Mysticism - True and False

by Father Savinien Louismet, O.S.B.

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Preface

It is not without a certain amount of diffidence that I now venture to offer to the public this new work of mine on "Mysticism True and False."

I fear that its usefulness and its close connection with the preceding volume on "The Mystical Life" may not be apparent to the casual reader. It is, however, a fact that, in my estimation, the twenty chapters on "The Mystical Life" have done but one half of the work of setting the right notion of it in its proper light. A great deal more remains to be accomplished, and that is the object of this new book.

We have, first of all, to differentiate the mystical life from what is non-essential or exceptional to it, namely, the miraculous. Then we have to contrast the genuine mystical life, which is always characterized by fervour, with its opposite or the state of tepidity; its counterfeits or the spurious forms of mysticism both outside the Church and inside it; its absolute negation or contradiction, which is the state of mortal sin wherever found, either in man or angel or separated soul, whether in time or in eternity. Finally, to crown all, we have to turn to the more congenial task of considering into what Mysticism will ultimately resolve itself.

Only when all this has been achieved shall we be able to say that, by God's grace, we have done full justice to the right concept of the Mystical Life. This is what I am attempting in these pages.

I notice with a deep feeling of gratitude that during the last year the circle of my sympathetic readers has greatly widened. My theme evidently appeals to many on its own merit, despite the shortcomings of my treatment of it.

Persons of all ranks and conditions of life, and of widely different religious convictions, have hailed my last book with something akin to the feeling of joy at coming suddenly upon a long lost friend. The idea of the mystical life being simply and solely THE LIFE WITH GOD, THROUGH ACTIVE love seems now well on its way: *"Elle est in marche; elle fera son chemin."* It will win; such is my unshaken hope. It may yet encounter contradiction; it has done so from the very outset of my pleading for a return to it. It invites discussion. Men's minds have to be enticed away from the wrong notion which is relatively modern, and brought back to the traditional one. This requires time as well as dispassionate consideration. Already signs of recognition and (if I may use the term) reconciliation, can be discerned. Some persons who, upon the appearance of the first treatise on "The Mystical Knowledge of God," had failed to grasp my meaning or to agree to the idea of its being the legitimate one, now come forward and are kind enough to acknowledge that, at any rate, my second treatise on "The Mystical Life" has cleared the way to a better understanding. Let us hope that this third one on "Mysticism M will overcome the last remnant of their intellectual difficulties.

As I write this Preface, the awful world-war is still raging and the end is not yet in sight From time to time, here and there, in the periodicals or in the speeches of public men, the pregnant topic of *reconstruction after the war* is touched upon. Every one is adjured to bring to bear upon the problems that will then confront us all the wisdom and good will at his command. By all means let this be done; at the same time let us also realize that no efforts of ours will avail unless we take God into account as well, and no sort of reconstruction of the social edifice will be durable which does not reinstate the Lord Jesus Christ in his place as the "foundation stone" of the whole fabric. Should my book, in

however modest a way, contribute to this result, I should feel amply repaid for the hard work it has cost me.

It is with great reluctance that, owing to shortage of paper and the increase in price of everything else, the editors have found themselves obliged to raise the price of this volume. The alternative before them was either to do so or to postpone indefinitely the publication of the book. In view of the close connection of this work with the preceding one, "The Mystical Life," and of the many and pressing demands for it, we have thought it advisable not to wait until the conditions of trade are normal again: for who knows when this will be?

- Father Savinien Louismet
The Abbey, Buckfast
On the Feast of the Blessed Joan of Arc
30 May 1918

The Miraculous

Thou, O Lord, art indeed a hidden God. - *Isaiah 45:15*

God is hidden behind the veil of natural causes as far as His natural presence and action are concerned. He hides His super- natural action and presence of love in the soul of the just behind the veil of faith and the Sacraments. During the thirty-three years of His life on earth, the Son of God was hidden behind the transparent veil of His sacred flesh, taken from the most pure womb of the Virgin Mary; and He is now totally hidden behind the veil of the sacramental species in the Sacrament of His love.

Is then God without the power of showing forth His presence and His action? Is He deprived of the means of lifting or drawing aside from time to time one or the other of these veils which are of His own making? Cannot He, when He so wills, intervene directly in the affairs of this lower world and manifest Himself to men? It would be absurd thus to set bounds to the Infinite power of God, and it would amount to a denial of God, pure and simple. Besides, we have positive evidence of such an intervention of God in human affairs. History, both sacred and profane, that of our own time as well as that of all past centuries, bears witness to the fact that God has a way of His own of showing forth, when He so wills, His presence and His action. God has a sign all His own, and when it appears, men even the most obtuse or the most obdurate, are compelled, unless they deliberately stultify themselves, to exclaim: *Here surely is the finger of God* (Exodus 8:19), the mark of God, the sign of God, the unmistakable sign of His presence and of His action.

That sign is *the miraculous*.

What is a miracle? What place does it hold in the economy of religion? What position does it occupy particularly in this department of religion which we call the "Mystical Life?" Is the miraculous the all in all of mystical life as some modem writers would fain have us believe? Or is it but an exception or at least an accidental adjunct to mystical life proper?

It is time that we should at last grapple at close quarters with this question, which is not difficult in itself, but which has been terribly obscured by the rashness of some writers. I propose to do so in this and the next two chapters. I want to show clearly that the miraculous is not an essential element of the mystical life, and that it is a grievous mistake to make the two terms *miraculous* and *mystical* synonymous. In order to do this successfully, I can think of nothing better than of offering first in this chapter a summary of the doctrine of miracle as I have gathered it from the Surama Theologica of Saint Thomas, However, in order not to tax the patience of the reader by incessant quotations, I will give here all together, for the use of the diligent student, the references in their proper order: Prima. qusest, 105 a. 6, 7, 8. - quaest, no a: 4. - 111, 3, 4. - 114 4, - 117, 3 ad prim. - Prima Secundae, quaest 111, a. 1, 4. - 113, 10. - Secunda Secundae, quaest. 171 - 178. - Tertia. quaest. 13 - 27 - 36. - 38 a. 2. ad 2. - 40. 2 ad 1. - 43-45. - 76. 8. - 84. 3 ad 4.

What, then, is a miracle?

A miracle is an event of the sensible order, which totally exceeds the capacity of created nature, and therefore can have but God alone for its secret cause. It is a marvellous sort of event, calculated forcibly to draw upon itself the attention of men, and excite their admiration. It is a kind of a sign, the special sign of God, which He employs in order to give to men an extraordinary demonstration of something supernatural, as for example, of His divine attributes: infinite

power, justice, mercy, love; or of some mystery of religion as the Holy Trinity, the Incarnation, the Redemption, the glory of Christ in Heaven, His real Presence in the Blessed Sacrament; or again, in order to give some glimpse of the Church Triumphant or of the Church Suffering, or of the present or of the future state of the Militant Church, or of the awful secrets of the world of sin and damnation; or, finally, in order to set in its proper light the wonderful sanctity of some servant of God, even during the days of his pilgrimage on earth, or to enable him to accomplish some special mission. This was the case, for instance, with St, Catherine of Siena, when she brought back the Papacy from Avignon to Rome, and with Blessed Joan of Arc, when she delivered France from the yoke of the English, to the greatest benefit of both nations.

From this description of miracle as a marvellous sign of God, totally exceeding the capacity of created nature, and given to men to teach them something supernatural, it will be easy to determine, and useful to point out, what is no miracle.

First, the work of the six days of creation was not a miracle properly speaking, though indeed the immediate work of God and stupendous beyond expression; because it was no exception to the laws of nature, but their very institution, and there was no man as vet to be a witness of the process. Secondly, the immediate creation of souls by Almighty God day by day, generation after generation, throughout all centuries is no miracle, since it evades the direct observation of man, and, is inviolably linked with the natural laws which rule the propagation of the race. Thirdly, the purely spiritual effects of grace under all its forms, of the Sacraments, of Prayer in all its degrees, of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; the justification of the sinner, the internal illumination and invigoration of a soul, the transformation of the fervent Christian into Christ; the wonderful ascent of the

same Christian, from virtue to virtue, even to the highest peak of heroic sanctity: all these purely spiritual effects are not miracles, because, in themselves, they are out of the sphere of the direct observation of men. Fourthly, the intervention on the one hand of our guardian angel, on the other of the devils in the affairs of our soul, have nothing of the miraculous as long as they do not take some tangible or visible form. Fifthly, the illusions of the devil, as is obvious, cannot be called miracles. Sixthly, the tricks of clever mountebanks, the frauds of sacrilegious scoundrels, be they ever so inexplicable to the simple minded, are not miracles.

Seventhly, nor are miracles those natural phenomena of rare occurrence, and the cause of which may happen to be unknown, such as an eclipse of the sun or of the moon, the aurora borealis, comets, shooting stars, etc., which have the privilege of exciting intense wonder, especially among the unlearned. Finally, though most of the extasies of the great servants of God are genuine miracles, some however, are not, as we shall explain in its proper place, in a subsequent volume.

There are three degrees of the miraculous: the lowest, the higher, and the highest. The lowest degree of a miracle consists "in the manner" in which an event takes place, as for instance, when a sick person is suddenly cured, as is related of Saint Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:15), or when a conversion from unbelief and sinfulness to sanctity is made, as that of Saint Paul, in an instant, all gradual process being dispensed with. The higher degree is the miracle called "in the person," as for instance, when a dead man is made to live again, or one born blind, to see. The highest degree of miracle is when "the whole substance" of the event totally exceeds the forces of created agencies, as when the shadow on the sun-dial of Ezechias was made to go back so many degrees (IV Reg. 20, 11), or when two

bodies are made to occupy the same space, as was the case in the virgin birth of Our Lord, and in His coming out of the tomb without removing the stone, and in His coming into the room the doors remaining closed; as will be the case also with all the predestined, after the resurrection of their bodies, whenever they encounter material obstacles to pass through them with the ease of a ray of light through clearest crystal.

Not all miracles are public. Some are accomplished in secret, so that only he who is the object of miraculous intervention knows the fact, and can give testimony of it. Such miracles have very often happened in the lives of the Saints. Some hidden miracles are Articles of Faith: thus the conception of Our Lord from a virgin, and His virgin birth. But those wrought in confirmation of the true faith are necessarily manifest: such were the many miracles performed by Our Lord during His public apostolate, as also those in favour of the people of God in the Old Testament, and those which the Apostles, the first Christians, the Martyrs and the Saints of all centuries have performed in order to establish or to consolidate the religion of Christ.

Although the gift of miracles is of the kind of graces called "gratis datae," and therefore must not be confused with the grace "gratum faciens," which is properly sanctifying grace, nevertheless certain dispositions such as a lively faith, either in the performer of the miracle or in him who is the object of it, perseverance in prayer and fasting, chastity, and an heroic spirit of mortification contribute greatly to the operation of miracles, as Our Lord has taken pains to inculcate time and again in His Gospel. Except in the blessed Soul of Our Lord, Who had it in its fulness to exercise it for Himself, and to communicate it to men as He willed, the grace of miracles is not an habitual possession but only a passing impression.

To what sort of operation of God is the performance of miracles to be ascribed? Simply to His natural intervention: God suspends the laws of nature by the same power that He established them. The invisible ministrations of the angels are pressed into service for the carrying out of miracles, just as they are pressed into service for the government of this material universe. *Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?* (Hebrews 1:14)

Almost innumerable are the varieties of miracles that have been wrought out by Almighty God at various times in the sky, on the earth, on the sea, on the persons of men, in beasts and plants and rocks and all the elements, in all departments of this material universe; as was fitting indeed to show forth His absolutely sovereign dominion over all the works of His hands.

Here, now, are some of the most common miracles:

The marvellous command given to some men over brute nature, animate and inanimate. This was very conspicuous in Moses, Elias, Elisaeus, Our Lord, His Apostles and certain privileged Saints. The gifts of tongues, of healing, of casting out devils, of prophecy, of reading the secret thoughts of men and the hidden state of their conscience; seeing God face to face in bodily form, as did Adam, Abraham, Moses; or after the resurrection of Our Lord, seeing Him in some incident of His earthly life and dolorous passion, or in His glory, or in the Blessed Sacrament; also seeing the Saints in glory, or the Holy Souls in Purgatory; or Angels or devils in bodily form and having speech with them;

The constancy of martyrs in the midst of the most horrible torments. Certain extraordinary diseases of the Saints, as for instance, those of Saint Lidwine of Schiedam. Living a

considerable time without food, or on no other nourishment than the Holy Eucharist. Bearing the Sacred Stigmata or a Crown of Thorns, sometimes visible, sometimes invisible, etc.;

Levitation of the body in the air; its instantaneous transportation at enormous distances, bi-location, whether real or only apparent;

Visions, revelations, locutions either perceptible to the senses or purely intellectual, raptures or the like extraordinary phenomena met with in the lives of the Saints.

The rules for discerning genuine miracles from apparent or spurious ones will find their proper place in a subsequent volume, when we shall have to treat of the "Discernment of the various Spirits." Suffice it to say that the Church is the supreme, infallible judge of the genuineness of miracles, because she has received from Our Lord, together with the Holy Ghost, the fulness of teaching authority and the promise of His own personal assistance: *Behold*, He said to His Apostles, on the day of His Ascension, *I am with you all days even to the consummation of the world.* (Matthew 28:20)

Miracle Versus Mysticism

It is difficult to imagine the confusion of mind which has led some modem Catholic writers to make Mysticism synonymous with Miracle.

Compare the two notions: they are simply contradictory of each other. The essence of Mysticism consists in its pure spiritualness and secrecy; on the contrary, that of Miracle in its manifestation, its coming into the order of things perceived by the senses, its striking wonder in the mind of those who witness it.

Mystical life, as we must by this time have realised, is nothing else but the intercourse of a loving soul with the loving God, in the secret of the heart. It is something hidden, secret, hence the name. Now, as long as God is blindly perceived by the loving soul in the secret of her heart, there is no miracle, because it is a purely spiritual fact; but the moment the vision of God takes a definite aspect, or words either intellectual or articulate are spoken and a distinct message delivered to the mystic, or some extraordinary, sensible token of what is passing between God and him is given to the outside world, then we are in the miraculous.

One may be justified in thinking that if all Christians lived the fulness of Christian life; the mystical life, pure and simple and common; lived it to the best of their ability, and to the fullest extent of the grace that would undoubtedly be given them - they would all be favoured, at some time or other of their pilgrimage, publicly or in secret, oftener in secret, with some miraculous communication from God. I am inclined to believe that whenever God meets with a truly faithful and generous soul, He cannot restrain Himself, and in the impetuosity of His love, He feels compelled to lift a

comer of the veil and allow His servant a glimpse, just a passing glimpse of heavenly things, or to deal out to him now and again one of those entrancing, heavenly delicacies which fill a soul with unutterable, unearthly delights.

The wonder, perhaps, is not so much that this should occur now and again, as we see in the lives of the Saints, but that it should, even with the Saints, be but the exception and not the constant rule. The wonder is that the supernatural presence of the loving God in the loving soul should not betray itself oftener in the body by miraculous effects, and that this marvellous new being, the fervent Christian, this true child of God, this little God should go through life appearing in no way different physically from other men abandoned to sloth and sin and infidelity. But there is good reason for such being the case. A comparison will help us to understand this.

During the earthly life of Our Lord, for obvious reasons, it was not desirable that the glory of His hypostatic union should break forth openly and habitually upon His human countenance, and shine in the eyes of all. It would have interfered with the plan of God as to the way of our redemption, made the Passion of Christ an impossibility, and wrung from men, by a sort of moral violence, the assent they ought to have given Him freely. Still the divine glory was even then, by right, due to His sacred Humanity, and it was, no doubt, in order to teach us this truth that the incident of the Transfiguration took place. Was the Transfiguration a miracle? It was rather the momentary cessation of a long continued miracle. It was by a miracle that the divine glory did not shine all the time around our Saviour, from the moment of His virginal birth to that of His entombment, and the Transfiguration was but a short respite, an interruption for a brief space of time of that life-long miracle.

Now very much in the same way we may assume that, for obvious reasons, it is desirable that during the days of their pilgrimage on earth, the essential glory of the mystical union of the Saints with God should not be allowed to shine continually in the eyes of men, by miraculous phenomena, such as visions, revelations, raptures, the gifts of healing, of prophecy, of command over nature. Otherwise it would gravely interfere with the conditions of our present life of trial, during which we are to walk by faith. It would put an earthly premium upon sanctity, tamper with the purity of our intention, take away the merit of faith, and threaten the solidity of the whole supernatural order. It would so glorify the true Church in the eyes of men as to interfere, by a sort of moral violence, with their free will. Moreover it would have within the Church the grave inconvenience of revealing, not only who are mystics, but also by contrast who are not; of publishing to the world the secret of consciences, since then we should have in our hands a test whereby to perceive who is a Saint, and by implication, also, who is a sinner. Furthermore it would make the lives of the Saints unbearable by reason of the many who would gape at them, follow them everywhere in order to see miracles, crowd around them and importune them. Finally, the gift of constant visions and revelations would render the lives of the Saints unendurable also by reason of the too intense joy and proportionately intense revulsion of sorrow which would be their lot: intensest joy at what they would be made to see and taste of the heavenly mysteries and, immediately after, sadness unspeakable at being compelled to live yet a while in such a world of sin and to mix with men who love not God.

From all this it clearly follows that we must look upon it as one of the laws of the genera] economy of grace, that with the Saints, as well as with the Holy Church and the world at large, miraculous phenomena are the exception and not the rule.

Is it not evident in view of all this, that those modem writers who now talk of mystical states, meaning thereby only extraordinary and miraculous states, make themselves guilty of an intolerable misuse of language? The mystical states arc the following: first, that of a beginner, which is called also the Way of Purity; secondly, that of one making progress, or the Illuminative Way; thirdly, that of the Perfect, or the Unitive Way. There are, in reality, no other mystical states but these three, and they are so irrespective of the presence or absence of any miraculous element. If some miraculous phenomena are occasionally super-added, these are something absolutely accidental, distinct from the mystical state as such, and they must not be confused with it.

Some miracles may, indeed, be a manifestation of the mystical life within, but they are not the mystical life itself, nor are they essential to it; they are simply an overgrowth, as it were, an ornament, as ivy on the wall of a beautiful castle, or on the rugged trunk of a giant of the forest. It is not because of some miracles wrought in their favour or performed by themselves that the Saints are mystics, but just the reverse: it is because they are mystics that some miraculous phenomena happen to them occasionally. The Saints are mystics first; and for some of them, at some time of their life, miracles are super-added by Almighty God, according to His Will, for some wise purpose of His own, over and above the common measure of mystical life. Our Lord proclaimed John the Baptist unsurpassed in holiness by the other men (Matthew 11:11), and yet we have the popular testimony of the Jews that he worked no miracle (John 10:41),

In fact, one can very well be a mystic without any miraculous adjunct, as on the other hand, one may happen to be no mystic at all, and yet, for some wise purpose of

God, be the subject of miraculous intervention, or even a performer of miracles. Thus the Fathers of the Church are agreed, on the evidence of the Gospel, that Judas, as well as the other Apostles, exercised the gifts of healing and of casting out devils. Thus also, at Lourdes, among the many persons miraculously cured, have been found infants, also adults in the state of actual sin and even downright infidels. Ivy is found on crumbling walls, and though it adorns them and the scenery at large, it is no sign of their solidity.

The Two Contrary Definitions of Mysticism

At this point we find ourselves confronted with the two definitions of mysticism: on the one hand the more modem or narrow definition, very much in favour to-day, both with Catholic and non-Catholic writers, which confines mystical life within the circle of extraordinary, miraculous phenomena; and on the other hand, the wider definition, the truly Catholic traditional one, which places the essence of mystical life in the secret intercourse of a fervent soul with God.

It would be possible to cite a mighty host of witnesses in favour of this contention, that the broad definition of mystical life as simply the life of union with God, is the Catholic, traditional one. Let a few suffice for the moment. The "Theologia Mystica" and other treatises of Dionysius the Areopagite, the "Scala Paradisi" of Saint John Climachus, the "De Quantitate Animae," "Epistola De Videndo Deo," and other works of Saint Augustine; the "Conferences of Cassian," the "Holy Rule" of Saint Benedict; the "Moralia" of Saint Gregory the Great; the mystical works of Hugh and Richard of Saint Victor; the treatise of Albertus Magnus, "De Adhaerendo Deo"; the Second Part of the "Summa Theologica" of Saint Thomas; the "Vitis Mystica," attributed by some to Saint Bonaventure; the "Following of Christ,"; the many and marvellous treatises hardly known today of John Gerson on the mystical life; the "Via Compendii ad Deum" of Cardinal Bona; the "Exercises of the Spiritual Life" of Abbot Cisneros, the celebrated "Exercises" of Saint Ignatius Loyola; the "Treatise of the Love of God" of Saint Francis of Sales; the deep and luminous treatises of Saint John of the Cross; the spiritual works of Blosius; all these, with hundreds of

others (every one of which is in its own way a practical introduction to the mystical life), make no mention whatever of miraculous manifestations as an essential part of the mystical life. It is true that a contemporary writer of no small repute informs us that "The Following of Christ is not a mystical book." What next? Perhaps we shall be told soon that the Epistles of Saint Paul or even the Four Gospels are not mystical books. The Sermon on the Mountain will not be considered as very mystical: there is no mention in this *Magna Charta* of Christianity, of any miraculous states or miraculous phenomena. We only read there: *Blessed are the poor in spirit . . . the clean of heart . . . they that suffer persecution. . . . If thy right eye cause thee to offend, pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . . Let your speech be yea, yea, no, no! . . . Love your enemies . . . that you may be the children of your Father who is in Heaven,* and many such expressions.

There is one Saint in the Middle Ages who towers above all others as a mystic - Saint Bernard. Let us single out this well-known and universally appreciated master. Now what is for him the main thing in mystical life? For Saint Bernard the only thing that matters, in the long range of spiritual life, is loving union with God, no mention being made of miraculous manifestations of any sort, in favour of the loving soul, the Spouse of Christ. Read his Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles, and all his other sermons and treatises and letters, and you will be convinced that for him mystical life is the loving intercourse of the soul with God in the secret of the heart - simply that and nothing else. Here is a real master of the spiritual craft, and do not fail to note this, one very highly favoured with the gift of miracles, and he brings back for us the notion of mystical life to its true and only legitimate meaning.

How mischievous the modem idea of mysticism is will readily appear, when we consider that it has a tendency to make us lose sight of the real value of the most wonderful gifts of God, which are by no means the extraordinary and miraculous ones, but the common ones. The best gifts of God in themselves, if we only knew how to appreciate them, are Baptism, Confirmation, Penance, Holy Communion, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the Real Presence day and night on our altars. No other gifts of God, here below, can be compared with these*

It has also a tendency to make weak-minded, superficial Christians desire the extraordinary favours for themselves, not indeed for any spiritual good there is in such gifts, but only for the sake of their exterior éclat, and the admiration of men, which these manifestations are apt to win for one. Moreover, it has given occasion not infrequently to bad men to play on the credulity of people and to feign miraculous powers, thus making themselves guilty of sacrilegious imposture.

Let us understand, once and for all, that what is greatest and most admirable in the Saints who have received visions, revelations, raptures, and perhaps stigmata, and who perform miracles, is not these things, but their union with God; yes, just what they have in common with us: their union with Christ through Baptism, their official enrolment in the active militia of Christ through Confirmation; and if they are Priests, the stupendous fact of their sharing in the eternal priesthood of Christ; and whether Priests or laymen, the marvellous privilege of eating the Flesh of Christ and drinking His Blood in Holy Communion. The difference lies in this that the Saints knew how to co-operate with the grace of these Sacraments and make them yield the fruits of sanctity.

The treatises avowedly written "for the guidance of those who are favoured with extraordinary and miraculous graces" would seem almost calculated to provoke a smile, for the writers would appear to be pursuing a method exactly opposite to that of the Good Shepherd. They do not leave on the mountain ninety-nine good sheep in order to run after one single erring one and bring it back to the fold; they seem rather to abandon the many erring ones* the enormous number of tepid, unsatisfactory Christians to their sad and dangerous condition, instead of shepherding them back to the mystical life pure and simple, to that life which is meant for all in common with the Saints; for that life is after all the life of Faith and the Sacraments, of the Theological virtues, of the Seven Gifts, of the Beatitudes, of unmiraculous mental prayer, of unmiraculous contemplation and of Good Works. Thus they labour uselessly in the endeavour to establish the rules of miraculous mystical life for a few souls here and there, who do not need such direction and will never read their book. One feels tempted to tell them: O my friends *Be zealous for the better gifts.* (I Corinthians 12:31)

Need we add that the Saints never desired the extraordinary favours of God? They feared them, for they knew that the way of safety is that in which there is no room for illusion, namely, the common way, the un- miraculous path, where Christians walk by faith under the steady guidance of Holy Mother Church. They knew that private revelations, though they may come from God, may come also from quite another sort of spirits, either from the devil or from one's own hallucinations, and that even when absolutely genuine and coming from God, a private revelation may be unconsciously wrought upon, added to or distorted by the recipient's own bias of mind and imagination. Hence the extreme reserve of the Church in receiving and approving visions and revelations even the most authentic, vouchsafed to the

greatest servants of God and related by them in obedience to their confessors or Superiors, or moved thereto by the Holy Ghost, so subtle and so difficult of elimination is the personal element. Hence also the absolutely child-like obedience of the Saints to the direction of their spiritual fathers, even when these ran counter to their revelations, well knowing that obedience is more pleasing to God than sacrifice. The great Saint Theresa is an example in point.

Before leaving this question of the respective merits of the two definitions of Mysticism - the one broad and traditional, the other modem and narrow - it may not be amiss to call the attention of the reader, for the last time, to what may be considered as the logical aspect of the case. In his "Doctrine of Development" (chapter I, section III) Cardinal Newman lays down several distinctive tests whereby may be made the distinction between true and legitimate development of an idea and what is no development but a downright corruption of it. In a genuine development of an idea there is always to be found:

I. Preservation of type of Idea.
II. Continuity of Principles.
III. Power of Assimilation.
IV. Early Anticipation.
V. Logical Sequence.
VI. Preservative Additions.
VII. Chronic Continuance.

Now, the idea of Mysticism in the Catholic Church, up to the sixteenth century, has been that of a secret intercourse of love between God and the Christian. Can we say that the modem idea is a desirable substitute for this primitive, traditional idea of Mysticism? or that it is a legitimate development of this primitive idea? In the light of the above seven tests, does it not rather appear as a deviation from the

traditional idea and a corruption of it? A volume could be written in proof of this, but let it suffice to call the attention of diligent students of philosophy and theology to this line of observation, for it would fully repay their labours to work it out for themselves.

The purpose of this volume is quite different. It is not contentious or controversial, except within the strict limits of absolute necessity. My aim is to state the traditional notion, to formulate it, to show it forth under all its aspects, to set it in its proper light and let it speak for itself. In the very harmoniousness of the development of this doctrine, in its weight and depth and unity and logical sequence, there is, it may be hoped, a sort of persuasiveness that can hardly be resisted.

Tepidity in the Light of Mysticism

Thus far we have been considering the part played on the one hand by the loving God, on the other hand by the loving soul, in the joint affair of the mystical life. Now, for these preliminaries to be complete, we have to consider also the case of the bad servants, of those, that is, who, in some way or other, will not abandon themselves to the loving advances of God and refuse to work with Him,

There are three different ways or degrees of being a bad servant: first, Tepidity; secondly, False Mysticism; thirdly, Mortal sin. This statement will help us, as shades in a painting, to set forth more clearly and, by contrast, to bring into its proper light, the idea of mystical life. For one thing, they serve at once to show us the essential requirements of a mystic, namely: *orthodox faith* as against false Mysticism; the *state of grace* as against mortal sin, and *fervent love* as against tepidity. No one can be called a mystic to whom any of these three gifts is lacking. Indeed, he that has suffered shipwreck of the faith, through heresy, or who never had the faith and consequently is outside the pale of the Catholic Church, how could he lay claim to the most exquisite familiarity with God? He is not of the family; he is not even yet born to supernatural life. As for the man, even if he be a Christian, who has fallen into mortal sin, he is dead to God: there is an abyss between him and God which must be bridged and passed over before he can again have the intercourse of love with God. The case of the tepid Christian, though not so desperate in itself as the other two, is bad enough, as we shall now see, and is perhaps the most perplexing of all.

What is tepidity?

We may define it as a certain state of the Christian soul, which Our Lord declares most unsatisfactory to Himself: that of being "neither hot nor cold," neither greatly criminal, nor at all fervent.

A Christian in that state provokes the divine nausea. Our Lord says of such a one: *"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot, but because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth."* (Apocalypse 3:15,16).

The tepid Christian does as little as he possibly can for God. He has no relish for heavenly things. He grudges all the time given to pious exercises; reduces his Confessions and Communions, Sunday devotions and daily prayers to the strictest minimum, and finds all religious functions tedious and irksome. The fact is his heart is elsewhere. Without perhaps owning it to himself, he secretly worships at the altars of the world. He has tried that compromise, of which Our Lord speaks in the Gospel, of *serving two masters* (Matthew 6:24), and has proved in himself that it will not work: so he takes inwardly and outwardly the attitude of a worldling, and he follows the maxima of the world, and he repeats its shibboleths with conviction.

It can hardly be said of him that he wants to avoid mortal sin: what he wishes to avoid is simply eternal punishment. Mortal sin, as such, has no terror for him, but he fears damnation. His faith avails him at least thus far. Has he still hope? It may at least be said that he has a kind of presumptuous hope of reaching Heaven some time and somehow; but he has certainly no keen desire of gaining it, and if it were possible to loiter indefinitely here below, he would much prefer this. Has he still charity? He may be said to have yet a spark of it, just enough for him to be still in the

state of grace; but the spark is quite out of sight, buried under a mountain of ashes and in perpetual danger of going out for good and forever.

Tepidity is a sort of half-way house between Mysticism and its opposite: the diabolical life, which is the life of sin. For the Christian who does not resolutely turn to mystical life, the state of grace itself is but a very precarious possession, and no one must be surprised to see him fall again and again into mortal sin. The tepid one falls thus occasionally, but because he manages somehow to rise again by means of attrition and the Sacrament of Penance, he is not in the least alarmed at his own condition.

The tepid Christian is well satisfied with himself as he is, and is quite determined to remain as he is. In fact this self-complacency in the midst of the grossest and most alarming imperfections, and this firm resolve not to change for the better, are the two characteristic features of tepidity. Our Lord rebukes him in these scathing terms: *Thou sayest: I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothings and thou knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be made rich, and mayest be clothed in white garments, that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear; and anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see.* (Apocalypse 3:18). But the lukewarm takes no heed. He is quite pleased with himself: he lives in a fool's paradise and persuades himself that all will come out right in the end. He is like the foolish virgins of the parable, up to the moment when the cry goes up in the middle of the night: *Behold the Bridegroom cometh, go ye forth to meet him!* (Matthew 25:6). Then indeed there is sudden trepidation of the lukewarm, and confusion, and looking for assurance to others who are not able to help him. Our Lord's threat in the Gospel is certainly intended for such

as he has become, and when this foolish one knocks at the gate of Heaven He will answer: *Amen, I say to you, I know you not.* (Matthew 25:12)

Behold I stand at the door and knock, says Our Lord Himself, still speaking to the lukewarm: *If any man shall hear My voice and open to Me the gate, I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me.* (Apocalypse 3:30) Here we have in these few words a most touching invitation to the mystical life and the description of it, but the tepid Christian will have none of it. He does not hear, or he does not want to hear, the gentle knocking and the pleading voice of his Saviour and Lover. He will not open to Him.

A homely similitude will serve further to illustrate the negative attitude of the tepid Christian in regard to God. If an empty bottle were dropped into the sea we know that water would rush into it at once and fill it to its utmost capacity. But suppose the empty bottle, instead of being open, is tightly stopped up and sealed, then the whole ocean presses around it in vain: no water will get into it. The whole strength of the mighty ocean is defied and set at naught by that puny thing. The sealed bottle may be caught up in the currents of the sea, or tossed up by the waves, or finally dashed against the rocks and shattered to bits: but so long as it remains whole and sealed up, it will also remain empty. Behold here an image of the tepid Christian soul.

The Christian is immersed body and soul in the infinite ocean of the love of God, in the divine supernatural order. If he be void of self, and of all worldly, inordinate affection, he will be filled to his utmost capacity with the divine element. He then becomes, so to say, a form of God: every mystic is in himself a form of God. (The word is not of my own invention; it is to be found in many spiritual treatises, notably in those of John Ruysbrock and in that of the celebrated Bishop Gay

on the Christian Virtues.) But if the Christian is closed against the inrush of God by self-complacency, or filled with inordinate love of created things, no entrance can be made into him.

It seems at times that it would be easier for God to break this human being, the lukewarm Christian, to annihilate him altogether, than to put an end to his obstinacy, and persuade him to lay himself open to the advances of divine love. But God does not annihilate. It is repugnant to His transcendent goodness that the end of his act should be nothingness. He has not created His own image and likeness in order to destroy it. What He has made out of love and for the purpose of sharing His own happiness, will have to stand for ever. The whole ocean, then, of the love of God, is pressing around this puny vessel in order to fill it with sanctity and happiness; but a time must come at last when the very love of God, defied and set at nought, will compel Him to reject the vessel that will not be turned to the purposes of love and cast it away on the shores of eternity, into the waste and desolate land which is called the hell of the damned.

In beautiful contrast with the callousness of the lukewarm stands the anxious sensitiveness of all souls of good will. When they hear the subject of tepidity mentioned they fear that all that is being said applies to them, and this very fear is the best proof that it is not so. A great searching of heart takes place on their part, and they find themselves full of imperfections. Such a one, on being questioned: But, do you love your imperfections? Do you want to keep them? will answer: Ah! no, I have a horror of them; I am constantly fighting against them, but they always manage to return. Be of good cheer, my friend: the very fact that you are fighting your imperfections, with whatever measure of success, makes it plain that you are not a slave of tepidity.

Let us never tire of repeating it, the characteristic feature of the tepid is not that he has imperfections, but that he will not amend them. Even fervent souls may happen to have a good many imperfections. A man may not yet be a saint, not yet have attained to a very high degree of perfection; he may be but a raw recruit, a beginner, just emerging from the slough of an impure life and the bondage of sin; nevertheless, provided he be fervent and zealous, provided he set to work with fervent love, and press on with fervent love, and persevere in fervent love, he will really be a mystic, even in the midst of distressing imperfections.

There are even souls who are eternal beginners, who seem unable somehow to get any further than the threshold of mystical life, and who yet should not be considered as tepid* Where the trouble lies with them may not be easy to determine; sometimes it is the fault of a wrong spiritual direction. But the very fact that they have the courage to keep beginning over and over again shows them to be of good will. Let them keep on; Our Lord will give them at any rate in Heaven a very great reward for their brave fighting.

Not unfrequently it happens also that a truly fervent soul, whilst passing through the ordeal of spiritual darkness and interior desolation, will mistake her state for that of tepidity, suffering thereby a twofold distress. Such a soul ought to be tenderly consoled and encouraged, to be assured that all is well with her, and that, in God's good time she will again see the light of His loving countenance. Meanwhile let her be patient: she is gaining great merits for Heaven. It is in the hottest and driest days of summer that the harvest turns to golden sheaves, and the fruit comes to full maturity.

To sum up all this chapter we may say that as tepidity is the unmistakable sign of the non-mystic, so is fervent love the

hall-mark of mysticism in all its degrees, from its beginning to its sublimest consummation.

Psychology of the Tepid Christian

The root of the trouble with the Tepid Christian lies in this: that he is satisfied with simply being a Christian, and will not act as one. It is the same disorder as that of a man who is satisfied with simply existing and declining to make use of his limbs and of his natural faculties, and refuse to play the man and to act as a reasonable free agent. When a man has been raised to the supernatural state he is expected to act up to it. God wants the Christian to think of Him a great deal, and lovingly and tenderly, and to use creatures as a ladder by which to raise himself into the sphere of the supernatural: all this the tepid Christian steadily refuses to do.

It is true that all the human acts of a Christian, which are morally good, are in themselves supernatural and worthy of an eternal reward. They are, so to say, automatically directed heavenwards by the very fact of his being in the state of grace. But this holds good only on condition that he does not introduce into his acts an element positively unchristian, such as an unworthy or perverse intention, either explicit or implicit. Now this is precisely the misfortune of the tepid man: that in his acts the Christian element, the implicit, habitual, pure intention is positively eliminated, and the quite explicit intention of simply gratifying self is substituted. This, apart even from any material, sinful disorder which often creeps in, is enough to take away from one's acts all savour of sanctity, all supernatural meritoriousness.

The whole substance of the Christian, body and soul, has been made one with Christ: the tree we may say has been taken bodily out of the sphere of pure nature, and rooted in

God. Does it not follow that the fruits of such a tree should now be all supernatural? Is it not a disconcerting phenomenon, a monstrous anomaly, when the tree, root and branch and all, is divine, that the fruits thereof are not also divine? The explanation is not far to seek. We are two entities in one being. The old Adam, though mortified in the Christian, is not yet dead; and when not kept down with the strong hand of the will, helped by the grace of God - when allowed to raise his head again and have his own way, this old Adam becomes the rival of the new man Jesus Christ and supplants Him, and becomes the ruling power and principle of all his acts. Thus his actions will have a bitter earthy taste, and will lose the divine savour. For the old Adam is of the earth earthy, and his natural inclinations are to pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger and sloth.

The Council of Trent (Session VI, chapter 5-7), declares that in the work of the justification of an adult person two distinct activities concur and co-operate in order to bring that man to the illumination of faith and the Sacrament of Baptism. By Baptism he has been made a new creature, the adopted child of God, brother of Jesus Christ and His living member, and the living, breathing temple of the Holy Ghost. The two activities are, on the one hand that of God, and on the other that of the party interested; God by His grace, rousing, strengthening, uplifting and upholding man above his natural self, and man by his will consenting and co-operating in all these divine effects. Such a happy concurrence of the two activities ought not to end at Baptism; on the contrary, it is more needed than ever thenceforth; for to live up to the requirements of the Christian state is no easy task. In the midst of a world of sin and invisible, spiritual enemies, such as the evil spirits who are full of cunning and of malice, and with the wounds of the threefold concupiscence in his nature, man, without divine assistance, stands in imminent peril. Not only is the grace of

God necessary, but it must be abundant and superabundant, or rather, let us say, it must be taken by man abundantly and superabundantly; for on the part of God, grace is offered to the soul with prodigious prodigality. There are the Sacraments, and the treasure of Holy Scriptures, and all the other means of sanctification found in the Catholic Church, to say nothing of the countless multitude and variety of interior, actual graces showered constantly upon all, good and bad, without any distinction. Truly it is not God Who ever fails man: it is man who betrays both God and his own interests, when, through tepidity, he will not make use of all the love of God and of all the graces at hand.

The two activities, that of God and that of man, should then go hand in hand, working harmoniously all through the life of the Christian in order to bring about this most marvellous result, the sanctity of mystical life. God, on His side, is most desirous to do His part. Man, on the other hand, is free either to co-operate heartily with God, or to haggle and try to drive a hard bargain, yielding himself as little as he possibly can, or even completely refusing his co-operation.

The tepid Christian has everything that God can give him in order to make him a mystic. He has received (to use the words of the Gospel) *one talent* (Matthew 25:24). On the one side of this talent is stamped the grace of the orthodox faith; on the other, the grace of the Sacraments. Now it is required of him that with this he will earn yet another talent. It is required that he will by his own exertion draw out of his orthodox faith the illumination of divine contemplation, and out of the grace of his Sacraments the practice of all Christian virtues, the three Theological ones, and the infused moral ones. The lukewarm Christian is too lazy to do this, or, at any rate, he has not love enough, His first talent he keeps wrapped up, so to say, in a napkin, and put away

out of sight; he will not earn the second talent, and so, through his own fault, he fails to become a mystic.

One can sometimes be made a Christian by Almighty God without any actual co-operation of one's own will: this we see in the case of infants when they are baptized; but one can never be made a mystic by Almighty God without one's own co-operation.

Why stand you here all the day idle? asked the householder in the parable, of those whom he wanted to send to his vineyard (Matthew 20:6). It is not said that they were idle after they went there. The tepid Christian is in the vineyard, and it is *there* he is idle. He is in the Church of God, in the state of grace, and he makes nothing of his privileges and opportunities. He neglects the exercise of virtues and divine contemplation through mental prayer. This is enough to deprive the Sacraments, even if he receives them frequently, of the greater part of their efficacy.

The Israelites in the Desert, cared for and marvellously fed by the constant intervention of God, should have been carried beyond themselves with admiration and gratitude; instead of this they repined and grumbled, calling to memory, with loud voices of regret, the flesh-pots and onions of Egypt, and they were ever ready to throw themselves into some gross, monstrous infidelity. These Israelites seem to represent an image of the Christian who allows himself to fall into the natural life of the old Adam. He is moving in the midst of a supernatural world, infinitely more marvellous than the Desert of Sinai. He is each day surrounded by divine favours incomparably more prodigious than those of the Israelites; such, for instance, as Holy Mass, Holy Communion; the Real Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, day and night; the presence of love of God within him, with the infused virtues and the seven Gifts

of the Holy Ghost, and innumerable actual graces, if he will only attend to them; but all these most precious favours of God make no impression on him* He looks aside and lusts after the worldly pleasures of those who know not God. The Holy Will of God, even when he is the direct object of all its tenderest cares, has no attraction for him.

How different the attitude of the true mystic, whether only a beginner, or already progressing or perfect. With his lips, with his body and soul, with his whole heart, he cries out to God constantly: *Lo, here I am! . . . Lord, what will Thou have me to do? . . . Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Behold! I come, and Thy law is in the midst of my heart . . . I am Thy servant, and the son of Thy handmaid. . . . Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to Thy word. . . . Father, not my will, but Thine be done. . . . Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven.*

The Furnace of Purgatory

We must now turn our attention to the ultimate results of tepidity.

In Saint Mark's Gospel (11:12-31) we have the statement that one day, as Jesus came out with His Apostles from Bethania, He was hungry. And when He had seen afar off a fig- tree having leaves, He came to look if perhaps He might find anything on it. He found nothing but leaves, for it was not the time for figs. Then Jesus uttered this solemn imprecation upon the tree: *May no man hereafter eat fruit of thee any more for ever.* And the next day, *when they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots. And Peter said to Him: Rabbi, behold the fig-tree, which Thou cursed, is withered away.*

The fig-tree with leaves and no fruit represents the lukewarm Christian. He has a certain promising appearance from afar, but no fruit to satisfy the hunger of Our Lord, It is said in the Gospel that it was not the time of fruit, and therefore it seems at first it was a strange act on the part of Our Lord to curse the fig-tree; but in the tree He cursed the Christian who yields no fruit, because with the Christian there is no time when he is not expected to bear fruit. The swift withering away of the tree is a terrible image of the doom of a fruitless soul, abandoned by grace, and called suddenly to its account.

Does Our Lord's action, with its consequence, mean death, physical death? or does it not perhaps mean the death of the soul, that is its being definitely abandoned by Our Lord, and, in consequence, falling into mortal sin and remaining in it, till death supervenes, whenever that may be? Either interpretation may be accepted*

Sometimes the doom does not overtake the sinner quite so suddenly. In Luke 13:6-9, Our Lord utters this parable: *A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the tiller of the vineyard: Behold, these three years I came seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none. Cut it down therefore; why doth it take up the ground? But he answering said to him: Lord, let it alone this year also, until I dig about it and dung it, and if haply it bear fruit; but if not, then, after that, thou shalt cut it down.*

Thus we see that if some are lost instantly, some also are granted a respite. The parable does not state whether after the year of grace, the fig-tree, hitherto barren, did produce some fruit and was saved; but let us suppose it was. The dresser of the vineyard, the guardian angel of that tepid soul, intercedes for it, and obtains a respite, and by dint of the most urgent solicitations, he wrings from it at last some poor, paltry fruits of good works. And, on the other hand, the mercy of Our Lord is so unspeakable that He will seize upon the least excuse in order to save even a lukewarm Christian. He will then be saved, *yet so as by fire.* (I Corinthians 3:15)

For whom is Purgatory intended if not for the tepid, half-hearted Christian? Who will make a long and terrible stay there if not the lukewarm? He would not burn during life here below with the flames of fervent love, so he will have to be burnt after death with the flames of divine wrath. He has wronged God very much, therefore he owes His divine justice and slighted love very great and prolonged satisfaction.

Apart even from its debt to the divine justice, it would seem that the tepid Christian's soul has to be detained in Purgatory, also for its own sake. The following comparisons will make the meaning plain.

The tepid Christian, whilst on earth, makes no progress. He may be compared to a rose-bud which should fail to open out and become a full-blown flower. The light, the heat, the dew and rain, all the atmospheric influences, so to say, of the love of God, surround him, press on him on every side. But by a sort of inverted miracle, he will not open out under the action of divine Revelation and the grace of the Sacraments. All thorough life he remains as a rosebud, shut up in himself and self-contained, and will not become the full-blown spiritual man. In vain does God call him to an active, holy life, and the joy attendant upon it. He will not drink in the light and heat of the love of God shining full upon him; he will not rejoice the eyes of God and His angels by putting on the vivid, bright colours of deeds of charity; he will exhale no perfume of supernatural goodness, but rather the rank odour of an almost purely natural life. Now, even if such a languid, undeveloped bud of a Christian does not eventually die out altogether on its stem, and have to be thrown away on the heap of rubbish which the fire of hell is to bum for ever; at all events, before it can be transplanted by the divine Gardener into the bowers of paradise, it will have to go through a very violent process of treatment by fire, in the hot-house of Purgatory.

I would again compare the Christian who fails during life to become a mystic, to a silkworm which has entered its chrysalis state but never progresses to that of a butterfly. The worm is our old man of sin, as he is before Baptism: the chrysalis is the infant or adult as he comes out of the Baptismal font wrapped about with the dazzling white cocoon of innocence. He is then a new being, with all the outlines and rudimental beginnings of the splendid supernatural faculties of Faith, Hope and Charity, and the infused moral virtues. All these are as so many lovely wings, which must spread out and take their full development before he can wing his flight into the azure of the Divine

Essence, and bask in the warm light of God's love, and alight on His infinite perfections, as on so many bright flowers, full of sweetest honey, out of which he would draw his nourishment. Only he must first of all break through the fetters of spiritual sloth, spread out his wings, that is to say, exercise his faith and hope and charity and other virtues, raise himself above the earth and, through mental prayer, fly on high and go in quest of the divine nectar of the sweetness of God, which he will draw into himself by holy contemplation. All this the tepid Christian leaves undone, satisfied with remaining a stunted, apathetic, motionless and colourless thing, until God takes it and thrusts it into the dread oven of Purgatory, where the poor soul cannot help but bestir itself at last and become, through most severe treatment by fire, the perfect butterfly of God, worthy of the garden of Paradise.

But are we not carried away here by our imagination? This may be true, but after all only to a slight extent. It is difficult to express the mysteries of the next world. The truth is that on the one hand the tepid soul which is finally saved, arrives at the end of her life undeveloped, but that the development after death is made instantly, and not progressively, whatever length of time that soul may have to abide in Purgatory.

There are two views concerning the state of a separated soul, which has to undergo the punishment of Purgatory. The first view is that which finds favour with the popular mind; the second, that which is the expression of strict theological truth. The first view is equivalent to what we say of the sun, when we speak of it as rising, and setting and moving, according to the time of the year, round us, through all the signs of the zodiac; the other is equivalent to the bald statement that it is not the sun which moves, but that it is the whole world of planets which moves around the sun. The

comparison, of course, must not be pressed: it is brought in here only to illustrate two different attitudes of the human mind respecting an objective, concrete fact of the next world, as revealed to us by the light of faith.

The popular mind about Purgatory is that one ends there by gradually acquiring purity and saintliness, whilst the theological truth is that a man, not a reprobate at the moment of death, becomes a perfect saint the moment after, whatever be his debts to the divine justice, which indeed will have to be paid to the very last farthing.

It is not every one who can grasp this theological truth, and that is why we need not try to make it prevail in the popular mind. But the greatest theologians assure us that the very first effect of the separation of the soul and body of a man who dies in the state of grace, is to constitute that soul in full and absolute moral rectitude. This is due to a certain law of the world of pure spirits into which this soul has now entered. Her very first act in her new condition has all the qualities proper to the acts of pure spirits: it is produced with full intensity and irrevocableness. Now, as this first act is one of adhesion to the Divine Goodness suddenly manifested to the soul, it is an act of perfect charity, which does away at once with all past blemishes of the soul.

Then one will be tempted to ask, why should this soul be detained at all in Purgatory when by her first act she is constituted in perfect sanctity? The answer is that she is so detained in order that she may pay the debts incurred during the days of her vanity. Can we not conceive the case of a personal friend of a King, loving his sovereign perfectly, and still more loved by his sovereign, and yet detained for some time far from him, in order to purge in prison some previous condemnation, so that perfect justice be done?

This, then, is how the case stands with the holy souls in Purgatory.

Out of the Church No Mysticism

Out of the Church there is no Mysticism, just as "Out of the Church there is no salvation."

This may appear at first sight not only an intolerant, but also a preposterous and unjustifiable proposition, and yet, when we look closely into it, we find it to be as sober a scientific statement of the matter in hand as was ever formulated, whether in the abstract sciences or in those of observation.

First of all let us see the meaning of these words: "Out of the Church." They mean out of the one and only Church which God made, out of the Church which Jesus built; out of the Church which is One, and Catholic, and Apostolic, whose visible head is the successor of Saint Peter, the Pope of Rome; out of the Church of the seven Sacraments and of the true Sacrifice of the Mass. Out of that Church there is no real Mysticism, no mystical life, no salvation.

On the Day of General Judgement all the redeemed will be found to have been, whilst in life, real Catholics at heart, whether they knew it or not, whether other men knew it or only God. They will be found to have been saved by no other agency than the grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ and incorporation, public or secret, in His mystical body the Church, and to have lived the life supernatural, the life of grace: thus, and in no other way, shall they be proclaimed worthy of admission to the eternal Nuptials of the Lamb. None but such shall find an entrance there.

Taken in this sense and with this qualification, that many who are not known to men as children *of the household of the faith* are nevertheless really so in the eyes of God, are really in the Church and not out of it, these propositions: Out

of the Church no salvation, and Out of the Church no Mysticism are absolutely uncontrovertible and intolerant of any addition or subtraction.

Do we then really contend that only a Catholic can be a mystic? Most assuredly this is the case.

Mysticism is a gift of God. Now, God is the Master of His gifts, and He has laid down His law in regard to that one gift precisely: the intercourse of mutual love between Him and man. It cannot be contested that God is the law-giver of the supernatural order, as much at least as of the natural. There man has not a word to say. Whenever he has attempted to establish the mystical connection outside the conditions laid down by Almighty God, he has conspicuously failed and not unfrequently fallen into monstrous errors.

God has laid down as the supreme law of mystical life that the means or medium of union with Him is faith in Christ: before His coming, faith in Him as in the Promised One of God, the Messiah; and after His coming, faith in Him as in the acknowledged Son of God and Redeemer of the world. Man has neither right, nor power to change this ordinance of God to introduce another name whereby he shall be illumined, united to God, and finally saved. For, says Saint Peter (Acts 4:12) *there is no other name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved.*

This is really an axiom and needs no demonstration. The wonder is that it should have to be recalled.

Therefore any man, in the past history of the world, or at the present time, or in the future, laying claim to supernatural authority to teach, and to power to unite to God, outside the Catholic Church, or within the Church outside her sanction, stands convicted of being either deluded or a sacrilegious

impostor. Show us the sign of God, we may ask such a man, show us miracles; or, without miracles, show us the sign manual of the Bride of Christ, her approbation.

Thus all pagan, idolatrous worships of one God or many gods, of devils, of nature, of natural objects, or of the dead are disproved and rejected. They are false Mysticism. So are the occult sciences of the past: they could never procure a loving intercourse between man and God. False Mysticism, all the ancient Mysteries, whether austere or licentious, of Koré, of Eleusis, of Dionysius, of Adonis, of Atys, of Mithra, of the Celtic religions. False the Mysticism of the Greek and Roman philosophers, *who,* says Saint Paul, *had known God, and not glorified Him as God . . . for professing themselves to be wise, become fools* (Romans 1:21,22); as well as that of the neoplatonists of subsequent epochs. False the Mysticism of the Gnostic heresies of the first centuries, A.D. and of the Middle Ages. Also the Judaic religion after the destruction of the second Temple, since it consists in the rejection of the true Christ, and the vain expectation of one of their own invention. Also the religion of the Koran, started by that impostor, Mahomet, and which spread so rapidly, well nigh threatening the extinction of Christianity. False the Mysticism of Pantheism under all its forms, the religion of the Brahmins, of Buddha, Shintoism, Hinduism, Totemism, whether of the Primitives past or present, or of Ancient Egypt: all forms of divination, magic, sorcery.

False the Mysticism of every Protestant heretical sect as such; and of all emotional forms of religion, without any doctrinal foundation; all the pious extravagances of revivalists, whatever be their names and colours, as, for instance, the so-called Salvation Army of today. Theosophy, Spiritualism, Christian Science, Occultism are on the same level, as also Freemasonry in all its degrees, whether it be British Freemasonry or Continental Freemasonry; for

although it is admitted that there is a great difference in the animus of the two kinds, yet they both equally vindicate to themselves a sort of doctrine and sacred rites and spiritual hierarchy not sanctioned, nay, formally disapproved and condemned by the Church. Finally, the "farrago of all heresies," branded by Pope Pius X with the name of Modernism, incurs the same censure. It is self-evident that none of these human or diabolical inventions can lead a man to God, and establish between him and his Maker the sweet intercourse of supernatural love.

A man can be very spiritually-minded indeed, really and truly austere and ascetical in his mode of life, as was for instance Plotinus, the founder of Neo Platonism, and yet, for all that, not be supernatural. The faint shadow of Mysticism that is discernible in such a case bears the same relation to true and genuine Mysticism as nature to the supernatural order. It is not the thing itself, it is at an infinite distance from it, and yet it shows already a certain aptitude for it. This aptitude may become the substratum or pedestal for true Mysticism to rest upon, if it be ever given by Almighty God, that is to say, if that man will ever lay himself open to the illuminations of faith and the inrush of the love of God.

The real mystics, known to God alone, that have existed before, the time of Christ outside the people of God, and after the time of Christ outside the public membership of the Catholic Church, are such, not by virtue of their heresy or schism, but in spite of it. By virtue of their genuine faith, either explicit or implicit, in Jesus Christ the Redeemer, and of their good will, they have been enabled to accomplish the law of God according to their light. The illustrious patriarch of Idumea, in the midst of his most grievous affliction, exclaimed: *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and in the last day I shall rise out of the earth, and I shall be clothed again*

toith my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God. . . . This my hope is laid up in my bosom. - Job 19:25-27

We conceive it as very likely that Job stands as the type and representative of a comparatively large number of righteous men, scattered among the Gentiles of all ages before Christ, whose privilege it was, by the grace of God, to have preserved faith in the primitive revelation and led a pure life, and thus to have laid themselves open to the mystical communications of the love of God. Furthermore, this may have been the case, and may be so to this day, and yet in times to come will be so with a number of souls, known to God alone, from among the wild tribes of the American forests or of darkest Africa, where Catholic missionaries more than once have come upon undoubted remains of the primitive religion, standing as majestic and indestructible ruins in the midst of the most cruel and degrading superstitions. As a matter of fact, before they have heard from the lips of the missionary the Gospel message of salvation, these people seem to me to stand, in regard to Our Lord, in the same relation as the Gentiles before His coming, and consequently to be under the same regime as to the economy of divine grace.

Marvellous indeed are the ways of God and the inventions of His love for the salvation of men of good will, wherever found, at all times and under all circumstances, be these never so unpromising, in appearance. Theologians assure us that even those heretics, who have not received the Sacrament of Baptism, either because it is not administered in their sect, or because it is administered so wrongly, or so carelessly, as to be vitiated in its form, may happen nevertheless to have the Baptism of desire; that is to say, the grace of Baptism without the Sacrament. The consequent result in such a case is that original sin is blotted out of the soul, and such a soul becomes as truly as

other Christians the adopted child of God, the living member of Jesus Christ, a secret member of the Church, and is, of course, enabled to live in the mystical intercourse of love with God,

The Bible - where it is not vitiated and added to by interpolation - as it is the true Word of God, helps a large number of souls of good will whose heresy is but material and not formal, to obtain glimpses of the mystical life, to come very near to it, nay, even to begin to live it: when they read, not in a spirit of contention, but in a spirit of prayerful humility, and for the very purpose of seeking God and finding Him.

It is true, at the same time, that they are at a terrible disadvantage, in that being left to their own private interpretation, they may, as Saint Peter warns us (II Peter 3:16), wrest the sacred text to their own perdition, and be led into the grossest form of self-delusion. The evolution of Protestantism has but too vividly illustrated this grave peril.

Still another terrible disadvantage of heretics is that they are deprived of the Sacraments of Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance and Extreme Unction, the first three of which are such mighty helps unto mystical life. The Greek schismatics and other Oriental Churches, which have preserved an unbroken succession of duly ordained priests and bishops are, in this regard, much better situated.

From all this it must appear how greatly favoured we Catholics are, being children of the household of the faith, true children of light, and in full participation of all the treasures of grace to be found in the Church. How easy it is for us to be mystics if we only desire it; as indeed it is incumbent on us to do. What confusion if, when we come to judgement, we are found wanting, when some poor savages,

some sorely puzzled heretics have succeeded, in the midst of most inauspicious circumstances, in making their way to God, and leading the mystical life. What a horrible judgement, though so palpably just, if the children of the Kingdom have to be ejected, when these strangers from the four winds of Heaven shall come and be seated at table in Paradise, with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob and all the Saints.

False Mysticism Within the Church - Jansenism

Beware lest any man impose upon you by philosophy and vain fallacy; according to the tradition of men, according to the rudiments of the world, and not according to Christ. (Colossians 2:8) Such is the warning of the Apostle to the Faithful of his time, at the very outset of Christianity. This same warning assuredly holds good after nineteen hundred years of the Church's life. The manifold and varied experiences through which she had to pass, have proved among other things, that not only is there no salvation for Mysticism outside the Church of God, but even within the Church there is no salvation for Mysticism but in perfect docility to her teaching.

Every form of spurious Mysticism within the Church has proved simply a perversion of the idea of the mutual love that ought to* subsist between God and the fervent soul.

It is always a palpable, gross deviation on some particular point, from the true spirit and express teaching of the Gospel of Christ and a perversion, one way or another, by exaggeration or attenuation, of the Gospel ideal of Christian perfection.

All forms of false Mysticism tend to one or other of the two extremes; either Rigorism or what for want of a better word we will call Laxism. Either they lay upon the man of good will who wants to go to God, burdens which Our Lord does not impose - a yoke which is not His own, light and sweet; or they proclaim the gate to be wide and the way to be broad that leadeth to life, whereas Our Lord declared these to be narrow and strait. Either they raise gratuitous obstacles

between the loving soul and God Who is the object of its love, or they wantonly do away with the necessary safeguards to perfect love, which are purity, piety and justice.

Whether they are aware of it or not, false mystics derive their peculiar principles from some formally heretical doctrine or from one tending to formal heresy. Rigorism links itself to Jansenism, which in its turn has a close affinity to Calvinism. Laxism, on the other hand, not unnaturally links itself to Quietism, which in its turn has affinities with Protestant Antinomianism and Hindu Pantheism.

It is only fair to remark that much spurious Mysticism is not Mysticism at all, but only talk, a mere dissertation upon Mysticism. *My little children*, says Saint John, let us not love in word nor in tongue, but in deed and in truth (I John 3:18). True Mysticism is all for practice.

It is not difficult to avoid the snares and pit-falls of spurious Mysticism. We could even contend that it is more difficult to be a false mystic than a true one; because science and erudition and skill of a sort are required thereto. A man has for this to be able to discourse with great subtlety upon God and man, upon grace and nature, upon free-will and delectation, and many other things; and it becomes necessary to force the soul into attitudes which are neither natural nor supernatural.

The plain Gospel is all that one needs in order to enter into the ways of mystical life, and to discern true Mysticism from false. With much more reason even than the Psalmist can the Christian exclaim: *Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my paths.* (Psalm 118) The true mystic guards himself as carefully from Rigorism as from Laxism, testing every suspicious doctrine by the plain teaching of the

Gospel, and where doubt may still exist, referring the matter to the judgement of Holy Church. It is not necessary even to know that there are such spurious forms of Mysticism: all that is necessary is to keep the Gospel in mind and follow the lead of interior grace; just as it is not necessary to know the heresies in order to avoid them, but simply to keep in mind the lessons of the Catechism,

Here one may perhaps be tempted to ask: But if true Mysticism is so easy, why should there be any false Mysticism at all? We may then put another question: Why should there be any sinners at all? The truth is, there need be no sinners, and there need be no false mystics, but God has placed man in the hands of his own, counsel: he is free to do right or wrong, to love truth and embrace it, or to prefer error.

This is precisely the root of merit; and it is one of the trials of our present condition that a wrong course of action should offer allurements to us. The love of novelty, the pleasure of having a following, of originating a new school of thought, of posing before the world; the natural restlessness of some minds and the wish to show one's erudition or skill in dispute: all these causes (and there are many others) would suffice to account for the existence of false opinions in matters where the Gospel teaching is as clear as daylight, and where it is of the greatest importance not to swerve from it.

Saint Paul says to his disciple Timothy: *The end of the Commandment is chanty from a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith: from which things some going astray are turned aside to vain talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither the things they say nor whereof they affirm.* (I Timothy 1:5,6) And again in the same Epistle (6:3,4): *If any man teach otherwise and*

consent not to the sound words of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and to that doctrine which is according to piety, he is proud, knowing nothing, but sick about questions and strifes of words, from which arise envies, contentions, blasphemies, etc. In his second Epistle to the same Timothy, Saint Paul says again: *Know this, that in the last days shall come on dangerous times. Men shall be lovers of themselves . . . having an appearance indeed of piety, but denying the power thereof. Of these sort are they who creep into houses, and lead captives silly women laden with sins, who are led away with divers desires: always learning and never attaining to the knowledge of the truth.* (II Timothy 3:1-7), One might almost fancy in reading these prophetic words that Saint Paul had in sight the Abb6 de Saint Cyran with his famous Mother Angelica, and the Barnabite Father Lacombe with his no less famous Madame Guyon.

The affectation of embracing the most rigorous opinions in matters of faith or of morals is usually the failing peculiar to men without experience, such as theologians, who spend their whole lives indoors at their studies, or again, men, young and rash, who have not yet come into contact with real life, and the souls of their fellow men. Seldom is Rigorism found among the evangelical workers, priests and missionaries, who have grown grey in the care of souls. Their zeal, matured by experience, is naturally sweetened with charity and mercy, and their opinions in matters of doctrine, in consonance with the Gospel of Christ are those that exalt the mercy of God above His justice. They know how necessary it is to comfort the faint-hearted and encourage the poor sinner in his hard struggle against evil habits, as also the man of good will and the Saint himself, in their many difficulties. They know how easily weak souls fall into discouragement and despair. And they know the yearning tenderness of the heart of Our Lord and of God for all, even for sinners the most wretched and abandoned.

The Jansenists have given us a horrible idea of God, a caricature, representing Him not as the Heavenly Father and Divine Saviour, and Spirit of Joy that He shows Himself in the New Testament, but as a harsh, whimsical, tyrannical master, unloving and unlovable* They made of the Sacrament of Penance such a difficult process that men finally gave it up in despair. They frightened people away from Holy Communion. They cast such a gloom over all the practices of religion, that it is no wonder large sections of Christians practically left the Church and would have nothing to do with it for the rest of their lives.

Could these men have ever read in the Gospel. that God is love, and did they realise that God made us, His reasonable creatures, to His own image and likeness; that is to say, capable with the help of grace of loving Him and of deserving to be loved by Him? Is it possible that they ever read the merciful utterances of Our Lord, the history of His miracles, the parables of the Good Samaritan, of the Prodigal, of the Good Shepherd; and the moving drama of His Sacred Passion? In order to frame their new Gospel, harsh and conducive only to despair, they must have deliberately turned aside from the Gospel of Jesus and from the lessons of divine mercy and tenderness, which breathe forth through all the Epistles of Saint Paul and the other Apostles, just as the Pharisees of old turned away from the person of Our Lord.

A spirit of Rigorism persisted long after the main tenets and maxims of Jansenism had been routed. Those of us who have passed the meridian of life may remember having seen in their childhood very saintly priests whose usefulness in the Church of God was marred by their unbending severity. Thanks be to God, this Rigorism has at last been exorcised from our midst, and Pope Pius X has dealt its deathblow in his decrees concerning daily Communion for all classes of

Christians, and even for little children. It now requires but very little skill to detect and reject any Jansenistic venom which may yet be lurking in some old books of piety.

Unfortunately this is not the case with that other form of false Mysticism, summed up and represented by Quietism, as we shall presently see.

False Mysticism Within the Church - Quietism

There is a great resemblance between laxism and tepidity, but there is also a difference, and it is this, that, while tepidity makes no pretence at giving itself a theological status and justification, laxism does.

Laxism is the system of so-called spirituality, which would conciliate piety with the widest concessions to worldliness, sensuality and self- love, It is a conception of Christian liberty growing beyond all reasonable bounds, even to unlimited licentiousness. It will, for instance, take hold of such a maxim as this of Saint Augustine: "Love God and do what thou wilt," which, rightly understood, is an affirmation that he who truly loves God can be trusted never to stray away from the faithful observance of His commandments. But people of this stamp twist it and pervert it to quite another meaning, wholly foreign to the mind of the great Saint who formulated it. Thus a frivolous Christian lady will succeed in forming her own conscience, or rather deforming it, to the point of finding it quite the correct thing to be seen in the morning of a great feast-day, Christmas or Easter, at Holy Communion, as modest and pious as an angel, and in the evening of the same day, in the ballroom, *en grand décolletée*; taking part in those fashionable dances which, as at present carried on, are revolting to every feeling of delicacy and propriety. The world approves of such doings. Now what is Our Lord's verdict in the Gospel? *You have heard that it was said to them of old: Thou shalt not commit adultery; but I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.* (Matthew 5:27,28) But if it be a grievous sin for a Christian man to look on a woman to lust

after her, will it be no sin on the part of the Christian woman to expose herself in an improper dress to be gazed at and lusted after? "Ah, but there can be no harm in it" is the excuse; "my intention is not evil." As well might the incendiary say he does not want to bum the house when he applies the flaming torch thereto. Is it not evident that these public exhibitions of immodesty, offer the greatest possible incentive to both private and public immorality in its worst and most insidious form? It is said that there even are spiritual directors who countenance, excuse, and justify such a course of action. Blind are they, leading the blind. The possible consequence is terrible to contemplate.

Upon the vantage ground of the wrong interpretation of "Ama et fac quod vis," these worldly-minded Christians meet with another class of dogmatists, who have deluged the world of piety with books about the pure love of God, and at the same time have authorized, under the garb of Mysticism, all sorts of licentiousness. Gentle reader, beware of books written "on the pure love of God," except those written by Saints, if such there be; for though there is an infinitude of books from the pens of Saints on the love of God, under one title or another, hardly will a single one be found bearing the suspicious label of "the pure love of God."

Simple-minded persons may be scandalized at this warning; but whoever knows the history of Quietism, will readily understand this caution.

As Jansenism is answerable for the falling away of large numbers of people in Catholic countries, from the public practice of religion, so Quietism, with all its vagaries, is answerable for most of the odium and ridicule that has been thrown upon the very idea of Mysticism, as also for the prejudices which are entertained against it to this very day. Many persons unite in the same reprobation genuine

Mysticism and spurious Mysticism. No distinction is made between them* People will put on the index all books on Mysticism, even those written by canonized Saints, which are full of the true spirit of the Gospel. They are afraid of reading such books; they not only will not recommend them, but will even dissuade others from reading them. They prefer to such works pious literature of an inferior quality, written by authors devoid of experience in the ways of God. And thus it is that souls are famished, and that modem piety has descended to such a degree of weakness and inefficiency.

This is as yet but an indirect result of the influence of Quietism. Were we now to detail all the direct injuries it has done to religion; were we to track its baleful influence in all branches of the spiritual life, and to point out how many otherwise good books of piety, especially in the seventeenth century, have been damaged by a single touch of Quietism, it is not one chapter only, but a whole volume and a very large one indeed, which would have to be written in order to do full justice to the subject. It will suffice for my present purpose to state the working principles of Quietism. Besides, we shall have more to say on the subject, in subsequent volumes, when treating at length of Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action.

The capital error of the Quietists is, that they propose to the mystic a state of union with God, absolutely impossible in the present life. They make perfection to consist in uninterrupted contemplation. But words are misleading here. For every right-minded and unbiassed person, on hearing the word contemplation, would naturally think of an active application of one's mind to the thought of God. Now that is not at all what the sectaries mean. In the state of quiet in which they pretend to plunge the soul, one must cease to reason, to reflect, nay, even to think on either one's

self or on God. One must even cease to perform any of the ordinary acts of faith, hope or charity: the sole function of the spiritual man consists, as they say, in the passive reception of the infused heavenly light which is supposed to accompany this state of inactive contemplation.

Carried to its logical conclusion, Quietism would infallibly lead to Antinomianism. This is the error of those who pretend that to the perfect all things are permitted, as they are incapable of losing their spiritual holiness by any act of theirs, be it ever such a direct violation of the law of God. In this sublime state of contemplation, all external things are held to become indifferent to the soul, because it is absorbed in God. Hence good works, the Sacraments, prayer, are not necessary, nay, they are hardly compatible with the repose of the soul. Hence also, in so complete a self-absorption, the soul is said to become independent of corporeal sense to the point that even obscene and licentious representations, impure movements of the sensitive part, criminal actions of the body, fail to contaminate the contemplating soul, or to make it incur the guilt of sin.

The Spanish priest, Molinos (1640-1696), the father of modem Quietism, does not shrink from giving expression to these monstrous tenets, as may be seen in Denziger's "Enchiridion Symbolorum," by the list of 68 propositions extracted from his works and duly condemned by Pope Innocent XI. Madame Guyon, the French propagandist of Quietism, though she protested that she had not read the works of Molinos when she elaborated her own system of spirituality, and though she professed to be horrified at the logical conclusions which might be worked out of her own principles, fully deserved the strong denunciations and severe measures of which she became the object both from the Church and the State. Finelon himself, the otherwise

saintly Archbishop of Cambrai, can hardly be absolved of rashness and obstinacy throughout all the controversy which raged around his book, entitled "Maxims of the Saints," which culminated in its condemnation by Pope Innocent XII.

Quietism is the very antithesis of Mysticism. Mysticism is, if anything, an active intercourse of the loving soul with the loving God; Quietism, on the contrary, condemns activity as a wicked thing, and is all for passivity. Quietists, in aiming at the simplification of man, do not take into account his complex nature, and the present conditions of our life on earth, so removed from the direct intuition of God. Catholic Mysticism takes man as he is at present, and without trying to bring about an impossible simplification of his nature, it simplifies his life in sanctifying him in body and in soul, through the efficacy of the Sacraments and the practice of all virtues, centering all his affections upon God, through Jesus Christ.

Our deification as described by Catholic Theology, and as brought about by true Mysticism, is not an absorption of out own substance into that of God, for then we should cease to be our own selves; that is to say, we should simply cease to be. God would not, humanly speaking, gain anything thereby, and we would lose all. Nor is our deification a sort of transubstantiation of ourselves into God, as Eckart contended: for this also would be tantamount to a suppression pure and simple of our very existence. The Christian, the true mystic, in his union with God, whether in this life or the next, will always preserve his own identity. He will remain himself for evermore in the individual substance of his own created being, personally distinct from all the rest of the world and from God; a little god by the grace of God, and yet not God. The divine transformation which gradually takes place in him through his vital union with Jesus Christ

to be consummated in glory, is a mighty change indeed, but accidental and not essential; a stupendous change in the quality of his substance, and in the habits of his faculties, and in the merits of his acts, but his person remains essentially the same human person for ever, marked with his own individuality, such as he will have formed it for himself. Adam will be Adam for ever. Paul will be Paul for ever: and it is in this preservation of their identity that their happiness will be rooted ineradicably.

Therefore, when Saint Teresa tells us that, in her raptures, there were moments when she could not distinguish any more her own being from that of God, we must take it in this wise, that though she at the time was unable to discern the distinction, nevertheless her own being remained quite distinct in itself from that of God.

Quietism has a very pronounced leaning towards the monstrous error of Pantheism, whilst orthodox Mysticism has an invincible horror of it.

The Best Manual of Mysticism

The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the holy Gospel as it has been written by the four Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the pure and simple Gospel, is the first, and by far the best, manual of Mysticism, as high above those written by the hands of men as the heavens are above the earth. And the best commentary upon this first manual of Mysticism is, taking them altogether as one book, the Acts of the Apostles, and the Epistles of Saint Paul and the other canonical Epistles, and the Apocalypse. Only the commentary is, in places, much more obscure than the text it is made to illustrate, and so it is not everyone who can understand it or profit by it. But every one, even the least cultured and most simple-minded, can understand all that is needful from the Gospel to profit by it, without diving below the surface to its very depths. For it is the characteristic of this marvellous book, that the most sublime genius will never be able to grasp its full meaning, whilst there is not even a child's mind to which it does not bring the plain message of the love of God in all its splendour.

The Old Testament is also a commentary upon the Gospel, but still more obscure and difficult to understand than the Epistles of Saint Paul and the rest of the New Testament; because, though it is the preparation and preface of the Gospel and contains it in anticipation as the bud contains the flower, still it presents to us a different character and physiognomy. Hence it is a mistake, under the law of Christ, to go back to the terrors and harshness of the first covenant. This mistake has been made by many a false mystic, and it is one reason among others why the Church has found herself compelled to put some salutary restraint upon the indiscriminate reading of the Scriptures.

The Gospel is a manual of Mysticism at once theoretical and practical, illuminating and moving. All others are borrowed from it, and are but echoes and repetitions, commentaries or explanations of it. All must conform thereto most accurately, under pain of failing to be in any way mystical. Some of these so-called spiritual treatises are weak dilutions of the Gospel: just a few drops of its generous wine, drowned in a sea of meaningless verbiage. Why not have the pure wine? There it is, at your elbow; it is all contained in the New Testament: *Eat, friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved.* (Canticle 5:1) Christians at the present day, as a rule, do not know their Gospel well enough, and are not conversant with it. It is small wonder that they are so frail and unstable, so easily upset or led astray. He alone who reads the Gospel assiduously can realize how far short he falls from practising it, and only he who really tries to put it into practice comes at last to understand it.

There are two ways of knowing: the first is by rote, mechanically, without touching the inner consciousness; the second is by a vital process of discovery or rediscovery, as it were, of that which previously made no impression, and a vital process of tasting, enjoying and assimilating it. Thus until by much reading and re-reading, prayer and meditation, one has made this discovery or rediscovery of the Gospel, one can hardly be said to possess the knowledge of it. When the point is arrived at, where it seems we had heretofore not known it, then is the soul flooded with light, and inundated with an inexpressibly entrancing spiritual delight. We must come at last to feel that the Gospel is not a book, a dead letter, but a teacher, a living person, the very one we sought for in our mystical life, God Himself, Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God. He it is and not the Evangelist who speaks to us from the Gospel page, straight into our very heart, if we only lay it open before Him. Then our Lord will cease to be a stranger, a distant person,

shadowy and unreal: we shall come into touch with Him, we shall live in His company, even as the Apostles did; we shall watch Him lovingly, and He will discover to us His secrets.

Some there are who have never read the holy Gospel, not even once, from end to end. They only know the extracts which are read at the Sunday Masses through the liturgical year, always the same, year after year. This is certainly good as far as it goes, only it does not go far enough; it leaves out too many of the sayings and doings of Our Lord. These persons have not the complete knowledge of Our Lord that they could and should have, and their souls suffer a loss in proportion to their ignorance. The Church does not intend that we should content ourselves with these extracts from the Gospel; she gives them to us as choice morsels and samples of the feast that is in store for us, to tempt our appetite and lead us on to partake of the whole course.

I would therefore suggest that every Christian read one of the many learned and beautiful Lives of Christ, written of late years by eminent Catholic authors, and in which all the events and discourses of Our Lord in the four Gospels are fused into one continuous story. This done, I should suggest that he take up the text itself of the Evangelists and read at least one chapter every day. Let him read and re-read it until he becomes quite familiar with it; and even then, keep on reading and rereading it, for it is the experience of all who have done so that at every fresh perusal new grace is imparted and new light and a new infusion of joy. Of course this is on condition that it is read slowly, thoughtfully and prayerfully. Once a habit has been formed of thus reading the Gospel and tasting the sweetness of it, there is little danger of becoming tired of the exercise. It would be easy to read the whole of the New Testament once a year, as it contains in all but 260 chapters: whilst it would take a little

over three years to read the whole Bible, from Genesis to the Apocalypse, at the rate of one chapter a day.

Most pious priests make it a practice of reading their daily chapter of Holy Scripture on their knees, and of devoutly kissing the sacred text. This certainly helps one to enter into a spirit of reverence and love. Still, one could not be blamed for sitting down at ease, whilst reading pen in hand, in order to follow up and note down any light received from the sacred page. The pen, plied industriously, is a marvellous instrument and a revealer of hidden secrets, even of the secrets of God.

If every educated Christian, layman as well as priest, were thus to feed his soul every day with the marrow of spiritual life, as it is in the Gospel, what a change there would soon come upon the world. How much more enlightened piety and sterling virtue and happiness for men, and glory to God there would be. Then indeed we should see Christians worthy of the name, like those of the Middle Ages or better still, of the first centuries of the Church.

It is for us, priests and religious, to bring again into the world such a happy state of things. It is in some measure within our power to achieve this desirable result* But we must begin by being real mystics ourselves before we can think of making others such; and for this purpose we must use the means set forth in this chapter.

Every good priest, ambitious of entering on the ways of true mystical life, and of teaching them to others, should make an analysis and a synthesis of the Gospels, breaking them into their component parts, and industriously reconstructing their whole scheme for himself upon some kind of a plan. The following would be as good as any: first, all that Jesus is; secondly, all that Jesus did; thirdly, the sayings and

discourses of Jesus; fourthly, all that Jesus suffered in order to enter into His glory - bringing all the texts of the separate Gospels under one or other of these headings. Or again, one could marshal all the texts under the two headings which form the double characteristic of mystical life: first, its uncompromising austerity; secondly, its unutterable sweetness; for Our Lord has said: *How narrow is the gate and strait is the way which leadeth to life*; but He has said also: *My yoke is sweet and my burthen light.* (Matthew 11:30) In these two sayings of Our Lord we have the whole Gospel in a nutshell; and it would be a labour of love to distribute all His other sayings and all His acts under one or other of these two fundamental principles of spirituality. It may prove still more interesting to the priest, if he uses a plan of his own devising.

Now, I feel quite sure that a person will not go far in this kind of work without being struck with the beauty and loveliness of the Gospel in a way previously unknown to him. He will be led naturally to the loving contemplation of Christ. He will spontaneously set himself with a will to make the Gospel the rule of his every thought and word, and desire and act. He will be drawn sweetly and irresistibly into imitating the apostolic life of his Divine Master. Jesus will thus become to His priest a living reality, and a perpetual presence, and an inspiration beyond words to express. What fruits of sanctity may not be expected from such a one, and what good work will he not do in his Master's vineyard.

A mystic? Yea, and much more than a mystic; for he will be also a father, a teacher and a guide of mystics. All this, thanks to his earnest, unremitting study of the first manual of Mysticism, the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom be glory for evermore 1

Sin in the Light of Mysticism

The existence of moral evil or sin is a fact which cannot be denied. In whatever light it may be viewed, or however one may try to account for it, one is compelled to admit that there are disordered actions of men, such, for instance, as murder, theft, perjury, adultery, intemperance, ungodliness: all arising from disordered affections such as hatred, envy, lust, sloth, pride. We meet with gross, palpable evidence of this evil everywhere around us, to say nothing of our personal experience of it in our own selves. Moreover, by natural implication and by the testimony of history, we know that it has been so throughout the past ages, going back from century to century to the very dawn of the history of the world. At this point divine revelation unveils before our eyes the fountain-head of this ocean of human misery and guilt, in the original sin of our first-parents - and the same authority furthermore discloses the fact that even the sin of Adam and Eve was not the first link in the long chain, for this sin connects itself, by the temptation of the evil one, with his own sin and that of the other fallen angels, when they raised the cry of rebellion against God in the paradise of their trial.

Sin is essentially a free, deliberate act contrary to right reason. The psalmist asks this question: *Who can understand sins?* (Psalm 18:13) No one can understand sin in itself, because it is a monstrous absurdity, the act of a reasonable creature, and yet an act contrary to right reason. Therefore, on the face of it, it is an act of self-destruction, an obliterating of the likeness of God in one self with one's own hands, a guilty returning to nothingness. Considered in the abstract - even apart from the incidental sufferings it entails on its perpetrator and on its victims, which are very

grievous, as we shall see in the next chapter - sin is the greatest evil that can ever happen, for it is the evil of the spirit. It is a falling away from God, a willful cutting off of communication with the spring of spiritual life, a throwing of oneself headlong into a bottomless abyss, a suicidal act; and, at the same time, an awful lie. Whilst the mystic says with the king-prophet: *It is good for me to adhere to God* (Psalm 72:28), because indeed he has experienced it to be so; the sinner, on the other hand, declares by his acts, if not by words of mouth: "It is good for me to turn away from God; it is good for me to adhere to created things instead of God; it is good for me, by falling back upon myself and things created, to return as far as in me lies into nothingness"; and all the while the event is giving him the lie. It is not good, it is very harmful for him to do these things.

There are two formidable aspects of sin. First, there is the evil done against God, inasmuch as din is an attack upon Him, an offence to His sanctity and love, an infringement upon His absolute sovereign rights. There is at the same time the evil done to the reasonable creature, in that sin separates him from God, Who is his very life, and precipitates the perpetrator of it into a depth of degradation and misery proportionate to the height of glory and happiness to which God had predestinated him.

The original mistake of the sinner is that, for the gratification of his passion, he practically refers everything to himself. To this unworthy end he turns the noble faculties of his body and soul, which were given him as so many instruments for the exclusive service of God. Moreover, he lays guilty hands upon the creatures animate and inanimate of this natural universe, all of which are God's property, and he reduces them to an unjust captivity, making use of them in spite of their groaning for his own nefarious purposes against the will of God, and against God Who created both him and

them for a noble end. But the height of injustice and folly is reached when the unfortunate sinner damns himself in this world and in the next by misusing his fellow men, even his own flesh and blood, a wife, children, subordinates, friends, dragging all these along with him into sin.

For this egotist the whole universe of things created is but a vast circumference of which he constitutes himself the centre. He refers and subordinates everything to his own self, even God, since he would have Him yield to his puny will. Now God cannot acquiesce in such a monstrous overthrow of his inalienable sovereign rights. The sweetness and harmony of order demands that everything be referred to God and subordinated to Him; the more so that God has in view the procuring of His own glory by means of our own happiness. Could anything be more desirable? The sinner, on the other hand, proposes to himself and to all he can press into service his own glory instead of that of God, his own will instead of that of God, at the cost of his own happiness, both temporal and eternal, and at the *cost of the precious souls of those he scandalises. Could anything be imagined more felonious and idiotic?

Now though he may, through want of faith or through inadvertence, be all unconscious of the fact, the terrible truth is that the centre towards which the sinner really gravitates, to which he is attracted, and to which he tends by the sheer weight of his guilt, is the hell of the damned. It is an article of faith that were he to die suddenly, unrepentant, as suddenly would he fall into the pit of hell, just as a stone, held above water, falls and is engulfed in the water, the instant it is released and abandoned, to its natural attraction. The sinner would not be with God, and out of God there is no future place for the reasonable creature, guilty of such a crime, but the eternal prison of hell.

In this regard there is no difference between him who is guilty of but one mortal sin and the man who is guilty of a multitude: they both belong to hell, though they are not in it as yet

The moment that the sinner by a first mortal sin achieves his severance from God, that very moment his name is blotted out of the book of life and inscribed on the rolls of hell. By right he now belongs to hell as much as the lost souls themselves, though it is yet in his power, with the grace of God if he will accept it, to cancel the terrible indenture.

The difference between sinner and sinner on earth, as also between reprobate and reprobate in hell, lies in the respective amount of guilt each one has incurred, and the special punishment meted out to him in consequence. We might say it lies radically in the degree of rottenness and filthiness to which each one has descended. A man just dead is as dead as one who died yesterday, or a week ago, or a month ago, or six months ago: but he is not yet such an object of horror as these latter, so the sinner who is guilty of but one mortal sin is as absolutely dead to the life of grace as he who is laden with a thousand mortal sins, but this latter is a greater object of the reprobation of God and of His vindictive justice.

This may serve to explain the warning of Our Lord to the sinner in the Apocalypse 3:1,2: *I know . . . that thou hast the name of being alive, and thou art dead. Be watchful and strengthen the things that remain, which are ready to die.* In the unfortunate Christian who has lost charity by but one mortal sin, there survive usually, first, the theological virtue of hope, then that of faith; formless, both of them, it is true (Latin *informes*), but still able, even as such, to prevent a greater ruin and to become somehow principles of a spiritual resurrection. There survive, moreover, all the acquired moral

virtues, and finally, at times, a certain lingering shadow of the spirit of prayer. There may even perchance be found in that soul a certain imitation of charity: a dangerous survival of the former state, because, says Saint Francis of Sales ("Love of God," Book IV, chapter 10 and 11), it serves but to deceive the wretched sinner, and keep him in illusion as to his real state. *The things that remain which are ready to die*, of which Our Lord speaks, are therefore the formless theological virtues of hope and faith, and the acquired moral virtues. The infused moral virtues which are as the suite and the handmaidens of Charity are struck dead the same moment as their queen.

The theological virtue of hope, rendered formless by mortal sin, may at last perish altogether, by the repetition or multiplication of criminal acts. There will come a moment when the soul will pass almost without transition from the height of presumption to the depths of despair. The yoke of sin grows heavier and heavier, the evil habits, like so many iron chains, become firmly riveted to the soul, and all prospect of deliverance is out of sight. Then the wretched man falls into discouragement, and drifting at the mercy of circumstances, is a ready prey to the most violent and sudden transports of passion, after which he is haunted by temptations of despair or even of suicide.

Christian hope being dead, faith may still survive formless and further weakened by the sad fate of hope: how very ailing, how severely shaken is shown by its occasional fainting fits, so to speak, or, to use another metaphor, by the partial and more or less prolonged eclipses of its light. Still even such a weak and fitful light is better than absolute darkness, and it may help the soul to avoid the worst pitfalls, and even direct its first steps towards a return to God.

The worst state of all is arrived at when faith itself has finally been put out, either by the sinner's committing certain particularly heinous crimes, or a deliberate intention on his part to extinguish its persistent flickering. However, do what he will, the light which he received in Baptism, with the indelible character or sign which marked him as a Christian, is never totally done away with, but from time to time from its dying embers sparks and flames spring up unexpectedly, which are the last appeals of God to a soul obstinately bent upon its own destruction.

To conclude, we may say that in the moral order there are two great centres of attraction, and only two: God, the loving God, and Hell, the Hell of the damned. All reasonable creatures, whether *in via* or *in termino*, converge towards one or other of these centres; attracted to the one by the mysterious force of charity: or to the other by that other force, the antithesis of charity, which is sin, habitual sin; for actual sin becomes habitual if it is not at once repented of and abolished by a good confession or an act of perfect contrition. Those *in termino*, both angels and the souls of the dead, are not only attracted to their centre, whichever this happens to be, but they are bound to it for ever. Souls which are yet in via have it in their power to wrench themselves from the one and transfer themselves to the other. All, whether *in termino* or *in via*, gravitate towards their centre of attraction with a force proportionate to their affection for charity or sin, respectively. The tepid Christian himself, just as the mystic of all degrees or the sinner of all shades, is also actually gravitating towards one of the two spheres of attraction, that of the God of love, or that whose focus is the hell of the damned. Only when, by not being actually in the state of mortal sin, he happens to be gravitating towards God, Who is the natural centre of charity, still he keeps himself at such an enormous distance from this centre that he cannot be warmed nor illumined by its rays, and, being

hardly conscious of the force that draws him, he obeys its attraction but sluggishly. He is so very near to the confines of the sphere whose centre of attraction is the hell of the damned, that it is not to be wondered at if he be suddenly whirled out of his former orbit and tossed into this one, to become one of those *wandering stars* of which Saint Jude speaks, *to whom the storm of darkness is reserved for ever.* (Judas 1:13). May the loving God preserve us from such a terrible fate.

The Hard Ways of Sin

My people have done two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have digged to themselves cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water. - *Jeremiah 2:13*

The key-note of mystical life is joy: a joy deep and pure, but hidden from the eyes of men; it does not preclude severe sufferings, both mental and physical; these will ever be the part of the pilgrim sojourning in this land of exile. After their severe flagellations in the presence of the council of their nation, the Apostles *went away rejoicing for that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus.* (Acts 5:41) *I am filled with comfort*, says Saint Paul, *I exceedingly abound with joy in all our tribulation.* (II Corinthians 7:4) The key-note of a sinful life, on the other hand, is sadness; but a secret sadness, which eats its way relentlessly into the very core of the sinner's heart, and though perforce it is concealed from the world, yet in spite of every effort, it will often manifest itself. How could it be otherwise with one who chooses to make himself the enemy of God and of his better self and of his fellow-men?

It is certainly a merciful dispensation by which sin always brings its own chastisement, even in this world - the poor sinner may take heed and escape at least eternal punishment. It is a law of the universe that every disorder brings uneasiness. A broken limb, a dislocated bone will cause an agony of suffering until it is properly set. Now, sin is the greatest of disorders, a moral disorder, causing uneasiness to the spirit even of angel or man; but very often with man it is also at the same time a physical and material

disorder, bringing in its own train both material and physical pain.

Let us glance rapidly at some of the sufferings, moral and physical, which are to be found in the trail of sin. First of all there is remorse. This skeleton in the cupboard is not at all a comforting companion for the diseased mind. The sinner tries to forget it, but he never completely succeeds. Then the fear of disclosure; and the confusion when one is discovered and becomes an object of reprobation to all right-minded persons, and even to the wicked and hypocritical, by whom, perhaps, the temptation and sin were caused. Bitter disappointment, disgust and nausea are also frequently in attendance; for the object which promised to give such rapturous delights has turned out to be a veritable apple of Sodom, alluring in appearance but changing to ashes and sulphur in the mouth. Loss of health, the squandering of fortune, exasperating recriminations, bitter regrets, burning reproaches: all these come as a matter of course. Then the distressing, maddening question which cannot but rise in the mind: How will all this end? It may be silenced for a while, but it rises again, importunate and persistent. The wretched sinner wrings his hands, turns his head away and feigns not to hear.

And now if the sinner remains obdurate, refusing to return like the Prodigal to God his heavenly Father, by true repentance and amendment of life, a new series of alarming symptoms will begin to manifest themselves. These are: 1. Deformation of the conscience. Though it is hard to kick against the goad, and with open eyes, yet at this point the sinner tries to persuade himself that black is white and white is black. 2. Spiritual blindness. An infatuation with the object of his passion now takes possession of the sinner, so that he cannot see anything else that matters in the whole world. 3. A weakening of the queen-faculty, the will.

Resisting power ceases entirely, and the soul is ready for every sort of abdication. 4. A hardening of the heart. Here sin is loved for its own sake; the sinner refuses to be released from his evil, resolved to pursue his course whithersoever it may lead him. 5. A lowering of the character to untold depths. Probity, sincerity, self-respect, natural affections, consideration for others, regard for public decency: all go by the board. 6. A monstrous perversion of the natural appetites, unbridled licentiousness of the imagination; overpowering, well- nigh irresistible tyranny of the senses, and a thorough disorganisation of the whole being, body and soul. 7. Terrible, shameful diseases, leading to the very verge of folly and despair. 8. The horrible fear of stealthily approaching death, and of what lies beyond. There is none who fears death like the sinner; his all in all is in and of this world - is it surprising that he should tremble at the very thought of Judgement? Then the probable transmission of the accursed germs of disease and vice to an innocent offspring.

Is this an overdrawn picture? Anyone acquainted with the world will be able to point out scores of cases, no less terrible than this.

Finally, there will be the posthumous effects of sin; that is to say, a whole brood of sins, which, after the sinner's death, may spring up from the scandals he caused during life. These may go on spreading and perpetuating and propagating without limit or end, till the very day of Judgement. Then will all these evils be attributed to the sinner who fathered them, and demand will be made for a revision of his account with the Divine Justice, and for proportionate aggravation of his eternal punishment.

And all along, during his wretched life on earth, to all the self-inflicted chastisement of the sinner, is added the

uneasiness arising from the fear of God: not a holy fear like that of the true children of God, who are in dread lest they offend their heavenly Father and incur His displeasure and lose Him; but an abject fear, a fear which makes the sinner shun God and look upon Him as an enemy, Adam, in order to taste freely of the forbidden fruit, put away his habit of the filial, holy fear of God; and on eating of the forbidden fruit was immediately seized with the abject fear of God.

He shuns God, he avoids meeting Him as heretofore, he hides from Him in the woods with his guilty consort, and when perforce he must face his offended Creator and Benefactor, he becomes impudent, which is another way of running away from God. He says: *The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion tempted me* (Genesis 3:12), as much as to say: "She is blameworthy, not I; nay, if we look well into it, Thou my God, Thou Who gavest her to me, Thou art the One to blame."

Does not every sinner in a way conduct himself like Adam, and blame God for his own evil deeds? Look at the typical modem man of the world: he entertains no holy fear of God, and can drink in sin like water. Nevertheless, he has at the same time a horrible dread of God. He cannot bear the thought of Him. The mere mention of His Holy Name is enough to throw that man into a frenzy. For months and years at a time he will not set foot in a church; and when forced to do so by worldly conventionality, to attend a wedding for instance, or the funeral of a friend, or for some civic demonstration, he does so with a shudder, as is plainly shown by his whole attitude. He flies in abject terror from before the face of God; he flies with a flight which very soon may be eternal. And all along he blames God, the loving God, the Holy One, not himself, for his own wickedness, The literature of the day, in all its branches, high and low, refined and coarse, light and learned, is saturated with this

sort of blasphemy. But it is not convincing, nor is it reassuring, and the louder the voice which gives expression to these horrors, the more evident becomes the abject fear of God, by which those who cry out are tormented.

Is it fear, even abject fear? Nay, it is something much worse: it is hatred, positive hatred of God of which the habitual sinner becomes at last possessed. Of course, the beginner in the ways of sin does not arrive all at once at such an extremity as this. He comes to it little by little, but he comes in the end to the point of actually hating the good God Who made him, and the loving Saviour Who died for him on the Cross. Because God forbids sin, and punishes it terribly even in this world and threatens an eternal, fearful punishment of it in the next, the sinner is brought step by step to hate with a positive and explicit hatred, the sanctity of God, His justice, His infinite perfections and His very Being. This is indeed one of the hard ways of sin. *We wearied ourselves in the ways of iniquity and destruction, and have walked through hard ways.* Thus speak the reprobates in the Book of Wisdom 5:7.

These, then, are the hard ways of sin. When we tell the silly youth bent upon eating of forbidden fruit, that sin hurts, he will not believe it. He argues with himself that these tales of woe are inventions of priests which at the most can only frighten little children. He persuades himself that he at least will not feel the worse for quaffing a generous draught of the cup of pleasure; that he will know when to stop, and that even if he gets a touch of fever in consequence he will soon be well again. Poor fool! How many such are to be seen, terribly caught indeed, and they are forced at last to cry out that sin does indeed hurt When by a very signal mercy of God the sinner is given the grace to desire to retrace his footsteps and return to a saintly life, he is confronted with really appalling difficulties. To mention at present but one,

among many, there is literally "the devil to pay/' The devil holds him and will not let him go. The devil has bought his soul; the sinner sold it to him, very cheap it is true, and he has been cheated in the bargain, but still the devil has his bond. He has taken his assurances. He holds a mortgage on the brain, another on the will-power, another on the imagination, another on the senses, still another on the nerves of the sinner. Oh 1 how hard it is to wrench oneself free from the devil's clutches! It must, nevertheless, be done, and that at all costs. It is a question of life and death, and of life and death eternal; and the longer the delay in the great and desperate effort towards the liberty of the children of God, the more the devil rivets his chains and weighs down the soul of the poor sinner with an iron yoke.

The Prodigal's Return

It may, at first sight, seem impossible for a poor sinner, after years of slavery to evil habits, to retrace his steps and return to a healthy and saintly state of life. But what is impossible to man is not impossible to God. If a miracle, or even a series of miracles, be needed to help the repentant sinner's good will, miracles will be forthcoming.

I do not mean thereby that the sinner will be spared the hardships of conversion; for these are a part of his expiation and a necessary discipline. It is required that by as many acts of self-indulgence as he descended to his present position on the road of perdition, by at least as many acts of self-restraint and self-renunciation shall he now retrace his steps before he can scale the heights of sanctity.

Do you think that the Prodigal's return home in the state in which he found himself was not fraught with appalling difficulties to his self- love? When the Good Shepherd lifted up the erring sheep from the thorny bush on the mountain crag where it had fallen and all but killed itself, and took it tenderly into His arms, He could not for all His loving care prevent the bruised sheep from feeling the pain of its hurts, nor the tediousness of the journey back to the fold, nor the discomfort of the heat of the day. The Good Samaritan, it is true, poured oil and vinegar into the wounds of the unfortunate traveller, who had fallen into the hands of highwaymen, been robbed and left half dead on the wayside. He skillfully bandaged the wounds, and with infinite care placed the man on his beast and led him to the nearest inn on the road. But for all that, he could not prevent fever setting in during the night; that was a consequence of the great loss of blood and the terrible nervous shock which

the poor man had sustained; neither could he forestall nor shorten the slow progress of recovery.

Although God has forgiven all past transgressions, as soon as a full, sincere and sorrowful confession of them has been made, and although the penitent has, by confession, banished the loathsome presence of sin from his soul, and is resolved with God's grace to begin a new life, nevertheless the consequences of sin still remain. He will have resolutely to grapple with these, nor can he hope to overcome them all at once, but gradually and by dint of patient and unremitting effort. The arch-fiend has been forced to evacuate the country he had invaded, but he leaves it bare and desolate, the fields are burnt, and the houses in ruins. Time and labour will be needed to clear the rubbish, to break up the ground again, to rebuild the houses, and thus bring the country to its former flourishing condition.

It may even happen occasionally, in the beginning of his conversion, that the poor penitent will relapse into sin after a long and protracted struggle. Has he really given full consent to evil? No one can tell - himself less than anyone. Whether quite a mortal sin or not their relapse is horribly painful, yet the poor sinner must rise at once. He remains dazed, sick and disgusted with himself, and very much frightened. Saint Angela of Foligno had such a relapse in the beginning of her conversion.

Thus it is absolutely certain that the sinner wishing to return to God has before him, besides the hardships common to all the servants of God, the prospect of some special sufferings which are the effects of his past sins, and would have been spared him if he had never left the path of virtue. He is therefore in need of a very powerful grace of God; but he is no sooner resolved to correspond to grace than he is, at once, lifted out of the depths of perdition and assumed into

the economy of divine life. This is already an immense miracle, the proportions of which we shall be able to appreciate only in paradise.

This is only the beginning. The penitent sinner has now to set out on his Way of the Cross and to climb his Calvary. He does so dragging himself heavily along, groaning under the weight of the awkward cross which he has hewn and carved out for himself, with his own hands; a cross made up of the shame of his past sins, of the falterings of nature and of the tyranny of inveterate evil habits; a heavy cross which occasionally bears him down and seems on the point of crushing him to death. So it proved to be with the illustrious penitent Mary of Egypt, in the first years of her solitary life. Now and again she fell into discouragement; almost but not quite into despair. It is so with every true penitent. At this point we behold a second miracle. Lo, the Lamb of God, the Divine Saviour walks before the weary pilgrim of Calvary, laden with His own still heavier Cross; bleeding, falling, rising again, and beckoning to him to follow. And virtue goes out of the sweet Saviour, so that, though trembling, the poor penitent is able to rise to his feet again and totter on; and now (marvellous to relate!) as he climbs higher and higher up the steep hill, he finds it more alluring than the broad way of his former life of sin, and he begins to love its very hardness.

Humiliations will not be spared him on the way: kicks and cuffs, and sneers and lashes of the tongue, and curses deep and loud from his former associates in sin. No one can leave with impunity the service of the world. How the devils hate the man who turns away from them to follow Jesus to Calvary!

Nor are these the severest trials. To the innocent Jesus Himself, the worst afflictions during His sacred Passion came,

not from the hands of men but from those of His Heavenly Father and from His own Hands; that is, from the horror and hatred with which He looked upon the sins of the world which He bore in His own Person. So also the true penitent must suffer. The severest trials come to him from the hands of God, and from his own hands.

Although God has forgiven him, the penitent himself will never until death forgive himself for having offended the Divine Majesty. Many and many a time will he break his heart in silent prayer, and melt into bitter tears at the recollection of his former offences. Thus did Saint Peter bewail all through his life the misfortune of having in a moment of weakness denied his Master. Tradition tells us that the tears in coursing incessantly from his eyes had traced deep furrows in his cheeks. The immortal Penitential Psalms bear witness to the deep, long-abiding sorrow of King David after his crime; and they furnish the penitents of all ages with an inspired form, in which to express their bitter regret for having offended God.

Now, in this abiding and persevering sorrow of the penitent sinner lies one of the greatest safeguards against a relapse into sin. There is little danger of doing again what is bewailed so bitterly. Lifelong observation goes to show that the reason why so many Christians lamentably relapse into grievous sin, even soon after good confessions - as good, at any rate, as attrition with holy absolution can make them - is chiefly that they do not cultivate an abiding sorrow for their former offences; or, what comes to the same, they do not cultivate a true love of God for Himself. They have received holy absolution with joy and with a deep sense of relief, but they perform no further penance than the light one imposed by the priest, nor do they feel the necessity of watching and praying against the recurrence of temptation. As soon as forgiven their sins are by them forgotten. And yet we are

warned by the oracle of the Holy Ghost. Be not without fear about sins forgiven (Eccli. 5:5). Hence the deplorable weakness of many Christians. What would also seem incredible is that repeated falls do not help them to grasp this principle of spiritual life, that, though God forgives the sinner, the sinner must never forgive himself: therein lies the surest safeguard for the future.

Wash me yet more from my iniquity (Psalm 50:4) sighs the true penitent with the King-Prophet. God hears his prayer and cleanses him more. For, although our heavenly Father has forgiven the sins of His penitent child, yet He chastises him, makes him suffer, allows him to feel the full weight of their horror and wickedness. This God does, not in anger but in love, not only in order to cleanse the soul more perfectly but in order to make it gain precious merits for heaven, thus redeeming lost time.

Hence it is that after the first transport of joy and sweetness, and fervour of conversion, there usually sets in a period of darkness and dryness and a withdrawal of spiritual consolations. Prayers, meditations, Communions - all seem absolutely devoid of the unction of piety. Sometimes a well-nigh invincible horror of confession will come upon the soul; fearful doubts arise, as to whether the sins of the past have been duly confessed and are really forgiven; for the time being the soul loses sight of the infinite mercy of God and the efficacy which the Sacraments derive from the merits of the Passion of Our Lord. The perplexed penitent, seeking vainly to alleviate his sufferings, desires while at the same time he dreads, to repeat over and over again his general Confession and, though he may do this, it will but serve to involve him in an inextricable maze of explanations and difficulties. The unbearable torment of scrupulosity and doubts against Faith infest the soul; and frightful

temptations against purity alternate with the fear of death and the judgement to come.

All this suffering is terrible and yet is it not better to be so tormented and pleasing to God than to be as heretofore a slave of the devil, living on the brink of hell? This soul is happy deep down within herself. She would not exchange her present state for the most joyful moments of her former life. She has become a spectacle to the world and to angels, to the Saints in heaven and to God Himself. We may reverently conjecture the palpitating interest with which they follow each incident, in the beautiful drama of the transformation of a sinner into a Saint, even into another Christ!

The supreme act will be accomplished in the mystical crucifixion and death on the Cross of the poor penitent. He must submit to be stripped of alt created affections, and allow his soul to be tom to shreds by the most cruel tortures, and finally to be nailed to the Cross, there to hang by its wounds. Then all the pains of this soul shall be gathered up into one, the greatest of all, the torment of thirst: the thirst for love, for the feeling of loving God and of being loved by Him. Of this cooling draught she shall be refused even one drop, and instead she shall be offered bitter gall and vinegar. She must go through the supreme ordeal of feeling abandoned by men and by God Himself, and cry out with Jesus in His extremity: *My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?* (Matthew 27:46)

Meanwhile there is more joy in Heaven upon the transformation of such a sinner into Jesus, and into Jesus Crucified, than upon the perseverance of ninety-nine just, who need not penance. This were enough, if it were possible, to fill even the Saints with envy of this poor penitent.

But the sublimity of his state is wholly hidden from him as yet. Hidden also, quite out of sight is the marvellous crown of jewels of eternal splendour, which all these painful victories over self are gaining for him.

Behold, at last, the moment of triumph is at hand, Jesus says to the dying sinner, his own friend and fellow-sufferer. *This day thou shalt be with Me in Paradise.* (Luke 23:43) *It is consummated.* (John 19:30) *Come, beloved, for winter is now passed* (Canticle 2:11); sadness is no more; the joyful voice of love is heard in our land; the flowers of eternal glory break forth all over thee: *enter thou into the joy of Thy Lord.* (Matthew 25:21)

What a chorus of congratulations then bursts forth upon the ears of the penitent elect, and what hosannahs of praise to God and jubilation are heard in Heaven when such a one makes entrance there.

Sinner, O my brother, it is yet in our power, yours and mine, with God's grace to secure ineffable joy such as this for ourselves, and to give joy to the hosts in Heaven above. We are wretched, yes, but the more wretched we are at present the greater will our achievement be. Shall we not start forth upon the journey?

The Unclean Spirits

These Outlines of the Doctrine of the Mystical Life would not be complete, and we should be guilty of a serious omission, were we not to take into account the fallen angels, their sin, and their action upon the world at large, as well as upon the Church of Christ, and upon each individual soul in particular. This consideration will help towards a true appreciation of Mysticism. It will also serve to bring out in clear perspective the fate of the purest and brightest of God's creatures, when once they have separated themselves from Him, Who is their life; and it will show us at the same time the wisdom and power of God Himself, Who from the evil of sin draws a greater good, namely, that of the sanctification of His elect and the manifestation of the treasures of His charity. Indeed the Church of Christ and every predestinate soul would be far less bright and holy than they now are had they not passed through the severe ordeal of temptation by devils and persecution by the wicked, and we should never have known the excess of the love of God for us had not the sin of our first parents given occasion for the awful mystery of our Redemption by the Cross.

By a wise counsel of God the devil is permitted to have a hand in the making of history. We cannot reckon without him. Nor could we explain without him the superhuman perversenes3 of some historical personages, such as Cain, Pharoah, Antiochus, Judas, Nero, Domitian, Arius, Mahomet, Luther, Voltaire, Robespierre, the Antichrist that is to come; nor the superhuman perverseness of associations such as Continental Freemasonry; nor the ugliest features of such great social upheavals as the so-called Reformation of the sixteenth century, the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, and the present world-war, with its

atrocities, sacrileges and immoralities on the part of, at least, some of the belligerents. The activity of Satan does much more than merely add a further source of temptation to the weakness of the world and of the flesh; it brings to bear also a combination and an intelligent direction of all the elements of evil, Man, even fallen from innocence and grace, would never have descended to the depths of wickedness he is capable of now had he been left to himself.

The devils are spirits of darkness; they are set out upon the task of casting darkness over the souls of men, to make them fall into errors, dogmatic and moral, and thus achieve their eternal ruin. It is worthy of the infinite wisdom of God to allow them to have their way for a time, whilst turning their malicious intent to His own ends. By their insane efforts the devils only succeed in threshing out the wheat of the divine Husbandman, separating it from the chaff upon the threshing floor of this present world. The wheat is being constantly taken up into Heaven by the blessed angels: only the chaff remains in the hands of the devils to be burnt for ever with them in the flames of hell.

Saint John Climachus, that great master and teacher of mystical Theology, in "The Steps of Paradise," shows us the devils, full of cunning and malice, incessantly applying the keenness of their intellects and the unbending strength of their perverted wills, to the one purpose of burning down, by means of the very fire which torments them, the temple of God; that is to say the Church of Jesus Christ, and every individual soul which, when in the state of grace, is also the temple of God, *Brethren,* says Saint Paul, *put you on the armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the snares of the devil, For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places. Wherefore take unto you the*

armour of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day and to stand in all things perfect Stand therefore having your loins girt about with truth and having on the breastplate of justice: in all things taking the shield of faith wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one. (Ephesians 6:11-16)

Our Lord calls the devils *unclean spirits*. It would be impossible to And another name which would characterize them more truly. The idea of uncleanness seems at first sight very repugnant to that of spirituality. The devils are angels, that is to say spirits, unmixed with bodily matter and therefore absolutely free from the passions of lust which are derived therefrom; how then can they be called unclean? Do not the two words, "unclean" and "spirit" involve a contradiction and an anomaly? However, we are prepared somewhat to understand this by what we have read (supra, chapter 11) of sin in the abstract, namely, that it is an absurdity, an anomaly, a guilty return to nothingness and therefore a corruption, making the subject of it unclean.

The devils are justly called unclean, though spirits, because they have embraced the state of sin and live in it for ever. The love of God is the only aroma which can preserve the reasonable creature from corruption. This love they have deliberately and definitely put away. They are moreover justly called unclean, because sin is now their only occupation: hating and blaspheming God, tempting men and tormenting themselves and one another and their victims, the reprobates in hell. These are the only uses to which they put their bright intellect and strong will. Finally, they are justly called unclean because they tempt man to commit the sins of the flesh for which they themselves, as pure spirits, have a horror intense and abiding. Such is their hatred of God that they incite men to this thing which causes in themselves an intolerable nausea; just as if a man

of noble birth and education and of refined tastes should hate another man to such an extent that he would do violence to himself and take in his hands the most unclean substance, in order to fling it at the picture of his enemy whose person he was unable to reach. Unclean indeed must they be accounted who are the instigators of all uncleanness.

From various passages of Holy Scripture - more particularly from Ezechiel 28:12-15, Isaias 14:13-15, Luke 10:18, and Apocalypse 12:1-9 - the Fathers of the Church and Scholastic Theologians have evolved the story of the fall of the Angels in the manner following: they assert that the sin of Lucifer and his followers consisted in their refusing to abide and persevere in the supernatural order in which God had placed them in the first moment of their existence. All the Angels of God, in the beginning, were created in a like state of grace. They were all made angels of light, children of God, dearly loved, highly exalted, and they were all alike destined after due probation to the glory and bliss of the Beatific Vision. They were not only endowed with a most excellent, purely spiritual nature, free from any defect or inclination to evil and sin, but they were moreover raised by grace, above their nature, to an unspeakable height of positive sanctity, and endowed with most admirable supernatural illumination and virtue. It was from such a height that, with open eyes, by their own choice, and without any temptation, they deliberately precipitated themselves.

Lucifer revolted against the precedence given to love over intellect. The splendour of his own natural gifts seems to have so dazzled him that he loathed the supernatural order, wherein magnificence of intellect counted for nothing if not accompanied by humility and love. He was enraged to see in the light of the revelation that was given to all the angels

during their probation, this great wonder in Heaven, a future Lucifer or Light-bearer brighter than himself, namely, the Virgin with the Child-God in her arms. He could not bring himself to acknowledge that a woman inferior to him in nature should at some future epoch be made his Queen, and that the seed of that woman should be preferred to himself for the honour of the Hypostatic Union. Thus it was that, when God the Father made known to all the Angels the coming of the First-Begotten in the humility of our flesh, and commanded them all to adore Him (Hebrews 1:6), Lucifer raised his great battle-cry, and his rebellion spread to some of the ranks of the angelic hierarchies, and we know the sequel.

So it followed that the devils, though still perfect in the incorruptible nature of pure spirits, are vitiated in their intellect and will in that they do not accept the supernatural order: they protest against it, they unceasingly wage war against it, and God allows them for a while to fight against it with all their might Saint Thomas says: *Daemon non habet cognitionem matutinam, necque vespertinam sed noctumam.* (Ia Quest. 64. i, ad 3). The devil will, on the one hand, never have the knowledge proper to the blessed in the Beatific Vision. On the other hand, by his apostacy he has fallen away from grace and from the divine light that was in him at his creation. He has merely the knowledge that is common to all pure spirits, which is very great indeed, but is only of natural things and does not make for happiness; it is but darkness in regard to the whole supernatural order. In his affections and in his acts the devil is monstrously deformed. From an angel of light he has changed himself into an angel of darkness; from a pure flame of love he has made himself a dragon and a burning brand of inextinguishable malice and hatred. Our quaint mediaeval painters were not, after all, far from the mark,

when they pictured the Devil in all sorts of shameful deformations and grotesque attitudes.

"The World of This Darkness"

In the banding together of the devils with the sinners of the world, is to be found an explanation of that strange phenomenon and that formidable power of evil upon earth called by the Apostle *The World of this Darkness.* (Ephesians 6:12)

By this expression Saint Paul does not mean the material universe of things visible, which God made, and which He solemnly declared in the beginning to be *very good* (Genesis 1:31), nor even that portion of it, the earth on which living men, divided into two opposite camps carry on their deeds of sanctity or of shame. By "the world of this darkness" the Apostle signifies only the whole company of sinners, together with their evil works in every department ofhuman activity. This is the world over which the devil is proclaimed prince. *The prince of this world*, as Our Lord says (John 12:31). When Christ was tempted in the desert, the Devil *took Him up into a high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, and said to Him: All these will I give Thee if, falling down, Thou wilt adore me.* (Matthew 4:8,9) This is the world against which Our Lord launches His anathemas: *Woe to the world on account of its scandals.* (Matthew 18:7) *O Father . . . I pray not for the world but for them whom Thou hast given Me. . . . They are not of the world, as I also am not of the world.* (John 17:5-16) To His brethren who did not believe in Him He said: *The world cannot hate you, but Me it hateth, because I give testimony of it that the works thereof are evil.* (John 7:7) To the Jews who did not receive His teaching, He declared: *You are from beneath, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.* (John 8:23) This is the world which Saint John says is *wholly seated in wickedness* (I

John 5:19), and of which he gives us solemn warning: *Love not the world, nor those things which are in the world. If any man love the world, the charity of the Father is not in him: for all that is in the world is the concupiscence of the flesh, and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life which is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the concupiscence thereof, but he that doth the will of God abideth for ever.* (I John 2:15-17)

So the world is the society of the wicked on earth, under the leadership of the devil. It is social, collective, cumulative, organized ungodliness. It is the City of Evil, *The great city which hath dominion over the kings of the earth* (Apocalypse 17:18) - the city of confusion, the Babel of contradiction and strife, the image of hell on earth, where men hate one another and agree together in but one thing, namely, in *fighting with the Lamb* (Apocalypse 17:14) - it is *Babylon the Great* (Apocalypse 17:5), as opposed to the City of God on earth, the Church Militant, which is made up of the servants of God under the leadership of Christ.

Between these two cities the Church of God on the one hand and the great Babylon of this world on the other, as the genius of Saint Augustine has sketched them out in his immortal work, "De Civitate Dei," there is irreconcilable enmity. The boundaries which separate them are not material ones, walls of stone or ditches dug in the earth. Their respective soldier-citizens are intermingled the ones with the others: and though God knows His own, the eyes of men cannot always distinguish in the strife and confusion, which are of God and which are of the devil. The world finds confederates in the very heart of the citadel, even on the steps of the sanctuary. At the same time the Church of God is fearlessly sending forth apostolic men to all the nations of the earth, who cease not continually to snatch victims from the lures of sin and from the very jaws of hell, and she finds

her faithful subjects in all classes of society. To the Angel of Pergamus Our Lord said in the Apocalypse: *I know where thou dwellest, where the seat of Satan is.* (Apocalypse 2:13) To every servant of God living in a great city where corruption is seething, these words may also fitly be addressed.

As the Church of God on earth has affinities with Heaven, and constant intercommunication with the blessed Angels and Saints and with God Himself, so the world of sin has affinities and constant intercommunication with the hell of the damned and its inhabitants. The Spiritism of to-day, like that of all past ages, would bear out this contention, were it necessary after the clear, emphatic and abundant testimony of the Scriptures.

The world is, at one and the same time, a lunatic asylum, a convict prison, a home for contagious and incurable diseases, a Barracks of the devil's militia, a den of unspeakable malefactors, a jungle full of wild beasts; it is a low and sordid theatre where, from one generation to another, the same ignoble tragi-comedy is enacted by drunken players; it is the shambles of all innocence and purity; an immense whited sepulchre, beautiful without, but full within of dead men's bones, and every sort of filth.

The world is the "Cloaca Maxima" of the sweet universe of God, into which all the festering rottenness of the seven capital sins is continually being shot in overwhelming quantities to be discharged into hell. No wonder its atmosphere is stifling. Its stench almost kills outright the souls of those who venture incautiously into its midst. Men marvel sometimes that young people, whose innocence has been safeguarded beneath the parental roof, or who have been educated by priests or nuns, suddenly fall into sin and give scandal, soon after making their appearance in the

world. These scandals must needs appear occasionally (as the Gospel warns us), but they need surprise no one. The education such young people receive at home or in the Convent school, or at the Catholic college may not be to blame in the least. Even if it is all it ought to be it does not because it cannot, prepare these young people for what they have to contend with in the world. That is more than ordinary virtue can withstand.

A comparison may make this plain. Suppose we were to thrust into the main sewers of some great city, let us say, London or Paris, a swarm of bees, some butterflies, some birds - swallows, nightingales, larks or some squirrels - how do you think these lovely denizens of the azure and of the realm of the pure air would fare in so dark and foul a place? How long do you think they would live? Not for a single day; perhaps not even for an hour. Only rats and bats could thrive in such an atmosphere. So it is with pure souls thrust into the world, that sewer or "Cloaca Maxima," which is carrying along on the impure stream of its literature, business and so-called pleasures and honours, the floating corpses of souls in all degrees of putrescence. No wonder the mystic - that child of light and song - having once tasted how sweet God is, will have nothing to do with it.

The question now naturally arises: if the dangers of the world are so appalling, so universal, so manifold, who can hope to save himself therein? It is not everyone who can betake himself into the desert as the hermits of old or seek the seclusion of the Cloister. What will the poor Christian in the world do?

A very pertinent question this, and one which brings into view one of the aspects of mystical life which is least understood, namely, the part played by the Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost in the general economy of grace.

In becoming a perfect Christian by the Sacrament of Confirmation, a man receives all he needs to enable him to cope with the difficulties of his situation in the midst of a corrupting and corrupted world. He is made a soldier and he is presented with a breastplate, arms and munitions. By the internal unction of the Holy Ghost, he is rendered immune from the poisonous gases as also from all pusillanimity and human respect. The slight blow he receives on the cheek at the hand of the Bishop is not only a symbol of what he ought to be ready to suffer for Christ, but it does actually and permanently confer on him the grace to be thus ready to suffer for the faith, even unto the shedding of his blood or even unto death, like the martyrs of old. All he needs henceforth is to live up to his promotion in the spiritual life, and make good use of the resources at his disposal. Let him bear in mind that he is now no longer a child, but a soldier, and that he must comport himself as such, unsheath his weapons, inhale and breathe forth the sweet odour of Jesus Christ, be strong in faith and fervent in love; in a word, that he must be a mystic.

In subsequent volumes we shall see at greater length how the Gifts of the Holy Ghost raise a man above himself, above nature, above even the grace of ordinary virtues, theological as well as moral, and they will, if he be attentive and docile to the internal movements of the Holy Ghost, make him a hero, not only on extraordinary occasions such as when he is called upon to confess his faith before tyrants, but even in all the ordinary circumstances of life: a genuine persevering and constant hero, by the purity of intention, the fervour of love and the perfect contempt of the world which he displays in all he does. It is enough for the present purpose in this chapter, if the consideration of *The world of this darkness* has furnished us with a fresh proof of the fact that every Christian ought to be a mystic. By the very perils of his situation in the world a man is called to be a mystic, and

he has, in the grace of the Sacrament of Confirmation, the wherewithal to become a mystic, if he will only lend an attentive ear to the inspirations of this grace.

If the further question be asked: why is it that such a high proportion of Christians who have received the Sacrament of Confirmation fail to conquer in their struggle with the world? the answer is simple: it is because, after having received this Sacrament, they think no more about it. They do not suspect the magnificence of the riches they have received, nor do they realise the serious obligation to strive after sanctity, for which every means has been put into their hands, which has thereby been laid upon them. Thus, through their own ignorance or culpable carelessness, the Divine Guest, the Holy Ghost, is bound and fettered in their soul: the omnipotence of Divine Love is reduced to inefficiency, and this great failure is entirely brought about by the lack of good dispositions in the lukewarm Christian.

The Sign of the Beast

The sure *mark of the beast* (Apocalypse 19:20) in fallen angel or sinful man, on earth or in hell, through time and eternity is unmysticism. This word may not be English as yet (the more the pity), but it will have to do duty as there is no other at hand which would render so accurately my meaning.

The exclusion of the grace of God, the actual and habitual state of sin, the being a slave to the concupiscence of the flesh, that of the eyes, the pride of life or to any of the capital sins, all these states of soul have one common characteristic, and can all be ranged under one comprehensive head: unmysticism, meaning thereby the negative attitude towards the supernatural.

There is speculative, philosophical, highly reasoned and dogmatical or pedantic unmysticism; there is impulsive, instinctive, and highly unreasoning unmysticism; there is practical, downright matter-of-fact unmysticism; and there is even religious unmysticism, one might almost say mystical un- mysticism. Now, the negative attitude towards the supernatural is, without any guilt on its part, the attitude proper of the beast. Therefore when it is guiltily assumed by the reasonable creature it reduces him to the level of the beast.

Tertullian calls the proud man "animal gloriae," just as Saint Paul calls the sensual man *animalis homo* (I Corinthians 2:14), and indeed is not the slave of pride, as much as the slave of sensual indulgence, one who has no relish for the things of God and who perceives not the things of mystical life?

What after all is the so-called intellectual, the modernist, the dilettante in matters of faith? A beast! "*Animal Gloria!*" He may strut and pose and play the Sir Oracle, yet by his unmysticism he has descended, together with the poor slave of drink and debauchery, to the level of the unreasoning brute. Here is tragedy! Here is irony with a vengeance!

The damned in hell will all be on the same level, in that they have rejected God and His knowledge; they have thus made themselves unreasoning creatures like unto beasts: they are beasts, every one of them, and Lucifer the greatest beast of all, *Bestia* (Apocalypse 20:9). This rejection casts him down to depths as great as were the heights of supernatural illumination and sanctity to which, as a pure spirit, and a very prince among the pure spirits, he had been raised by the loving God, Disobedience or the breaking off of proper relations between creature and Creator, was taken by him and all his train for a mark of superiority, but instead it has proved an unmistakable sign of deterioration. Of a truth, only the humility of faith, coupled with the fervour of charity, makes us true men and children of God.

Ultimately the sinner on earth and the reprobate in hell, man or angel, have this in common: God displeases them Who is the sovereign good. They are filled with regret at the thought that God is infinitely holy, just and good, loving and omnipotent, the First Cause, the Last End and the Supreme Lawgiver. They would have a god of their own fashioning or none at all. They put the question to themselves: Why does not God leave us alone? Why does He refer us to Himself? Why does He not allow us to be happy in our own way? Why should we take any account of Him?

Now we declare emphatically that whoever is touched with this blight shows the mark of the beast.

It is his attitude towards the Divine order and plan which is itself a source of torment and vexation to the reprobate. The manifestation of God in nature, the revelation of the Three Divine Persons in Holy Writ, the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God, of the Redemption of man by the Cross, of the Church of Christ with its Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and the Seven Sacraments: these things cause him tortures of disquietude. He is enraged at the multitudes of angels that remained immovable in their allegiance to God, and thus attained the glory and bliss of Heaven; that so many men are saved by serving and loving God, that the Virgin Mary is Queen over all; and that the Nuptials of the Lamb will fill the Blessed with everlasting glory. All these facts, so inexpressibly grand and beautiful and good, displease him, and this is why we say he is unreasonable, like unto the brute.

The reprobates, then, are the unloving ones, "les sans-amour," and they are themselves unlovable. Unmysticism, such is their disease, and they themselves have made it incurable. Is not this a frightful state of affairs?

There are two courses open to all men: that which leads to a life with God, in his friendship and active love, by the deliberate acceptance of the whole supernatural order, culminating in the mystical union of the soul with God; or that which leads to a deliberate refusal of the friendship and the love of God and to a willful withdrawal from the supernatural, which renders the mystical union of the soul with God impossible.

The sin of the rebel angels was a refusal to abide and persevere in the mystical union with God in which they had been created. The sin of Eve in yielding to the temptation of the devil and eating the forbidden fruit was likewise a discarding or rejection of the supernatural order, and by this

rash act her mystical union with God was brought to an end. Adam's sin also, in giving preference to the wishes of his guilty wife rather than to the known will of God, was a terrible descent from the high supernatural regions of mystical union with God, to the domain of the purely natural - a descent which he also consummated, freely and with open eyes.

In the same way every actual sin, if analysed, is found to be a refusal to enter into the supernatural order or a willful withdrawal from it, whereby all possibility of mystical union of the soul with God is precluded. By sin, therefore, the soul either contravenes the light of reason and refuses the light of faith; or having received the light of faith, she fails to follow it up to the consummation of charity in the mystical union with God.

We shall find that all false religions, after all, are nothing but a substitution of natural elements for the supernatural ones. What is Paganism but the worship of nature under symbols more or less ingenious or more or less brutish? Heresies, in their attacks against certain revealed truths, are simply so many attempts at putting the human sense in the place of the divine authority. Freemasonry, as has been ascertained from its secret teaching as well as from its consistent public action all over the world, has no other end but to snatch the whole human race from Jesus Christ and subjugate it to the worship of pure reason. Now, the worship of pure reason is not quite the same as the worship of purity. This was startlingly demonstrated during the French Revolution, when "la Déesse Raison" impersonated in "le marbre vivant d'une chair prostituée" to use the words of Lacordaire - was unveiled with sacrilegious pomp and ceremony on the high altar of Notre Dame in Paris. Every sinner, by going against the light of reason and revelation, substitutes for the worship of God the idolatrous worship of the creature, that is

to say, of his own self, or some other created object, animate or inanimate: gold or flesh or filth. Like the devil, he desires something more than the mystical union with God, and that something more in the end is found to be infinitely less and horribly degrading.

The Mystical Order of the Universe

From the survey in the preceding chapter of the common characteristic of sin in all its manifestations, we have a right to say that the supernatural order might as well be called the mystical order.

Since the purpose of true religion is no other than to bring man to a perfect union of love with God, in which the mystical life truly consists, we arrive at the remarkable conclusion that the whole question of the supernatural is really one of Mysticism.

The question put first to the angels, and afterwards to Adam, and now to each one of us individually, is this: Do you accept the mystical union of love with God or will you not? Sin is a flat refusal, regardless of consequences, to embrace or sustain this mystical union with God.

Tepidity on the other hand may be said to be, as we have seen, a dangerous benumbing of the mystical faculties, a paralysis verging on the confines of spiritual death. Only the avowed and uncompromising mystic is safe. "Mystid in tuto," we might say, using a phrase of Bossuet in a somewhat different way from him. Only the mystic embraces the supernatural order with all its consequences, in all its bearings upon human life, as summed up in the Commandment: *Thou shall love the Lord thy God, with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind.* (Matthew 22:37) Now one who so wholly and perfectly loves God, loves himself also wisely, and cannot but love his neighbour in a chaste and generous spirit and in a manner wholly supernatural. Only mystics can love thus; that is to say, in such a manner that their union with God is not hampered by their love of any person or thing created.

But we will go a step further and prove that all things whatever are mystical, each in its proper place and degree (the sinner and his sin, of course, excepted). Not only the things of religion, such as Holy Mass, the Sacraments, the Divine Scriptures, persons and things consecrated to God, and the pious acts of Christians in their different states of life are mystical, but the whole material universe also. The firmament bedecked with millions of stars, the earth with its varied productions and inhabitants, the mighty ocean, the laws of nature, the elements, the seasons, the lengthening out of time in days and months and years and centuries; each separate system of things and each creature individually, from the constellation in the remotest depths of space, down to the infinitesimally small, invisible speck of a being, situated seemingly on the very verge of nothingness: all these, and along with them, man, poised as it were, between two immensities, the one of greatness above him, the other of smallness below him; all these may properly be called mystical. They are mystical, not only by their value as demonstrations of God's existence, of His transcendence and infinite perfections, or again by their symbolical and allegorical value which is very great - this all mystics delight in telling us - but moreover in themselves, in their proper substantial reality, as things sanctified in Our Lord Jesus Christ and in a way united to Him. Not only is God naturally and necessarily implied in the existence of all things, He being present in each one by His divine immanence: not only does God maintain and support them by a continual putting forth of His creative energy; but it has pleased Him moreover gratuitously to establish between them and His Divine Incarnate Son a relation of an incomparably higher order, to give them a share now in the sanctifying of souls and the perfecting of the elect, and hereafter to assume them into the realm of His Infinite Glory.

We distinguish for the sake of convenience, the different orders in the scheme of the universe: the order of nature, the order of grace, and the order of glory, but we must not speak of these as if they were separate and independent of one another: in Christ Jesus they are integral parts of one grand order, which, if we must call it by a comprehensive name, I would propose to style "the Mystical Order."

That the order of nature is not isolated from that of grace, and that both are destined to be together transmuted into the order of glory in Christ Jesus is evident as far as man is concerned. The two elements, nature and grace, are as the warp and woof of our present state, necessary one to the other, upholding one another and coming to naught if separated. It takes a man to make a Christian, as it requires a pure spirit to make a Blessed Angel On the other hand, if the supernatural element be taken from either man or angel, this noble being will be shattered and become respectively a devil or a reprobate. Then both the good Angel and the Christian were from the first predestined to be raised to glory, and not only they but the whole material universe together with them.

We shall be repaid for our trouble if we examine thoroughly this proposition: that the whole material universe, along with men and angels, is involved in the Mystical Order. We have been too much accustomed, in this infidel age of ours, to look upon the whole world of creation with secularized intellects, if we may use the expression, and to think of it all as an order of things in which sinner and saint alike have common right of dominion; whilst the truth is that the whole order of nature should be viewed only in the light of God Who made it, and of the purpose for which He made it, which is the filling in of Christ; and that the sinner, precisely because he has broken with God, has forfeited all right over the things of this world. If he is still allowed for a brief space

to use them freely, it is only on sufferance, and to give him time to return to a better frame of mind. *Knowest thou not (O man) that the benignity of God leadeth thee to penance?* (Romans 2:4)

Everything that is, whether animate or inanimate, is of God, and is in God, and is for God and His Christ and His Saints, and exists for them only.

The material world is a divine parable of the love of God for man. Heaven, earth, sea and hell itself witness with a million voices the secret which is the sole felicity of man: the love of God; but how many refuse to hear? Each single creature is a portion of the great created mirror of God, Nature; and each part reflects in its tiny compass what the whole mirror reveals upon a more magnificent scale. Everything that is, reflects in its own way the Power, the Wisdom, the Goodness, and above all, the Love of Our Heavenly Father. God is love; all love in Himself, in His operations ad extra, in the necessary relation of all things to His divine goodness, and in the gratuitous supernatural relations He has introduced into the world through His Son Jesus Christ. Thus everything that is is steeped in the divine essence and love, made part of a grand mystical order, and manifests it in Christ.

Reason alone, unaided by divine revelation, might discern much of this truth, but a brilliant flood of light is poured upon the subject by the mystery of the Incarnation. The Martyr- ology, on the 25th of December, opens out with this sublime announcement: "Jesus Christus, aetemus Deus, aetemique Dei Filius, Mundum Volens Adventu suo piissimo consecrare, de Spiritu Sancto conceptus, nascitur cx Maria Virgine factus homo." The whole universe of things created is consecrated and sanctified in the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord, and in Its turn, the Sacred Humanity consecrates and

sanctifies the world by being made from it and part of it and its crowning glory, and also by acting in it, with it, and upon it.

The whole world was already sacramental, leading to God, vibrating with the glory of its Maker and quivering with unspoken aspiration to enter through man into the mystical union of love with God. The whole inferior world was already aflame with the love of God for us and groaning and travailing in its dumb desire to render love for love. It was left to man to make or mar the happiness of the inferior world; and man was betraying its expectations, when lo, there comes down upon it one of the Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity, the Son of God. He takes His stand in the midst of things created, making Himself one of them when at the same time He is the centre of the universe of all things visible or invisible. He gathers into His Hands the threads of nature and holds everything fast to His own divine Self, all in love. Shall we now say that the world is not mystical?

We may consider the Universe as a book written by the finger of God, in which He narrates His infinite perfections and sums them all up in this one stupendous word: Love. In this book the readers themselves, angels and men, are some of the most beautiful chapters; yet the last and crowning one of all, the summary and the triumphant conclusion to which the rest lead up, is Jesus Christ. We have already seen in a preceding volume ("The Mystical Life," chapter 12) how the different species of beings in the whole range of inferior nature form as it were, so many steps towards the fulfillment of the Incarnation, Our Lord in His Human nature being the end of all the works of God "ad extra." He is not only the Last Chapter, but the First as well: *The image of the invisible God, the first born of every creature.* (Colossians 1:15) *In the head of the book it is written of me.* (Hebrews 10:7) *I am*

Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. . . . the first and the last. (Apocalypse 1:8,17) Therefore nothing can escape the mystical grasp of the Son of God made Man. Jesus must be named in all the chapters of the book of creation, for indeed they speak of Him be it in the faintest accents or the most obscure terms. We must spell out His sacred name from every page and read everything in its light, under pain of not understanding what we read. The misfortune of our infidel modem scientists even as it is that of the fallen angels, is precisely that they do not read the Book of God thus, and, as a consequence, their science stands self-condemned. It is not "cognitio matutina" nor "vespertina," it is "nocturna" - it is all darkness. Jesus is not in it, He Who is the very light of the world (John 8:12), the all in all of this world and the next. *The Father loveth the Son and He hath given all things into His hand.* (John 3:35) *All things are delivered to Me by My Father.* (Matthew 11:27) *He hath put all things in subjection under His feet.* (Hebrews 2:8)

With fine scorn did the great Bishop of Tulle, Monsignor Berteaud, in his pastoral of 1864, rail at the men of his time who would have ousted God from the world and claimed the nineteenth century for their own. "Is anything their own?" he asks. "Is time theirs? Is the world theirs? Who gave it them?" He goes on to show that God has given all things to His Christ, and that if the present world is still preserved in existence they may thank the Church of Christ which they are persecuting, for its preservation. For as the Father does everything for the sake of His Christ, so Jesus Christ in His turn orders everything for the sake of His mystical Bride, the Church of the elect. The present world will not endure one moment longer than is necessary for the making of the last of the Saints.

Hear the inspired accents of the Royal Prophet celebrating these mysteries: *Why have the Gentiles raged and the people devised vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the princes met together against the Lord and against His Christ (saying): Let us break their bonds asunder, and let us cast away their yoke from us. He that dwelleth in Heaven shall laugh at them, and the Lord shall deride them. Then shall He speak to them in His anger, and trouble them in His rage; but I am appointed King by Him over Sion, His holy mountain, preaching His commandment, The Lord hath said to Me; Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of Me and I will give Thee the Gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for Thy possession. Thou shall rule them with a rod of iron, and shalt break them in pieces like a potter's vessel.* (Psalm 2:1-9)

Mysticism therefore, far from being something exceptional, an overgrowth or an out*. growth of religion, is the very breath of it: it is the whole of religion, for it is the great law of all the world in its every department. It is the force of attraction which goes out from the Sacred Humanity of Our Lord Jesus Christ to all things created, consecrating and illuminating them. In violently wrenching themselves, as far as in them lies, from this all pervading and powerful attraction of the mystical order of things, the sinner and the reprobate do but give greater evidence to this law of the universe, as we shall see in the next chapter.

"The Second Death" in the Light of Mysticism

God spared not the angels that sinned, but having cast them down into the place of torments, delivered them into the chains of hell, to be tormented, to be reserved unto judgement. (II Peter 2:4) *But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, their portion shall be in the pool burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.* (Apocalypse 21:8) *And His zeal will take armour, and He will arm the creature for the revenge of his enemies.* (Wisdom 5:18)

Then shall He say to them also that shall be on His left hand; Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. (Matthew 25:41) *The smoke of their torments shall ascend up for ever and ever.* (Apocalypse 14:11)

Sin being what it is, namely, the very worst kind of disorder, a disorder of the spirit - as we have now considered at some length - the ineffable sanctity of God cannot allow it to pass unnoticed, to go for ever unrepressed, or at any rate, unpunished. To the immaculate law of love and of the mystical union of the reasonable creature with its Creator, there needs must be attached a chastisement in case of transgression. This must have been sufficiently promulgated, that is to say, announced beforehand, that it might act as a deterrent and a providential safeguard to the would-be evil doer. Then if sin be committed, this sanction must, in God's good time (immediately and with lightning-like rapidity for the rebel angels, with merciful delays in the case of man) be sternly applied, that the balance of right

order in the sweet universe of God, be not permanently disturbed.

This chastisement by the very nature of the case can be no other essentially than the irrevocable separation from God, Who is the life of the spirit - the rejection by Him in this life and in the next. *Depart from Me, you that work iniquity.* (Matthew 7:23) *Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.* (Matthew 25:41)

The sinner on earth makes light enough of being cast away from the grace and the love of God. Mystical union with the Sovereign Good has for him no allurement, nor has actual ex- communication from the mystical order, thus far, any terror. Only the formidable prospect of the hell of the damned can make any impression on the wretch. Even that, if he still continue in his sin, may fail at last to rouse him to a sense of his guilt and of his awful danger, even when his sin has already spoiled his life on earth to the extent of making it an anticipated hell.

In what day soever thou shall eat of it, thou shalt die the death. (Genesis 2:17) Thus spoke God to Adam, when He notified to him upon what condition he was to hold the tenure of his present happy state and earn the future eternal bliss of Heaven.

The mind of the first man, at once ancestor and representative of the whole human race, was then in all its pristine vigour, fresh from the hands of God and from his first entrancing intercourse with Him, with the light of reason and that of revelation shining full upon him in all their splendour, and there can be no doubt that he caught the full import of these words of God. There can be no doubt, either, though the Scriptures are silent on the subject, that all the Angels, at the time of their probation, were fully

informed beforehand of the secrets of eternal life, that is to say, of Heaven and hell as an alternative requital of the goodness or perverseness of their own free acts. Only, in the state of primal innocence, neither the angels first, nor man afterwards, knew experientially what the threat of death could mean. This, however, placed them under no disadvantage whatsoever.

Speculative knowledge coupled with the love of God ought to have been sufficient to save them from committing sin. A man need not go through the process of breaking his own neck before he can make up his mind to enjoy life rather than throw himself down a precipice.

Hell is at the same time a place and a state.

It is the final state of those who have failed in the great business of making themselves fit for divine union and a state of unredeemable wickedness. The first chastisement of sin persevered in to the end of one's life on earth is that it remains what it is. It remains sin, that is to say, a painful and monstrous disorder, and it will be such from henceforth and for evermore. Only the grace of God could have changed the sinner into a penitent and a saint during the days of his probation. He refused grace obstinately and perseveringly, to the very end, until death supervened and made him radically incapable of receiving it any more. The sinner now can change himself no more than a dead carrion carcass can change itself into a living body. By his own act he has become for ever a dead thing, a corrupt and stinking corpse (metaphorically speaking), and an abomination before God and His blessed Angels and Saints.

Of course a monstrous thing like this cannot be allowed to remain for ever in the open to disgrace the fair face of creation. Of necessity it has to be swept out of sight, and

cast into the great pit, into the awful great sink of hell, which was excavated by the just wrath of God for the fallen angels on the morning of creation.

Some pious people cherish the fond imagination that if a lost soul were set free from hell and allowed to return to earth for ever so short a time, it would appall the world by the rigour of its penance in its efforts to make its peace with God. This cannot be maintained theologically. In the face of the serene and admirably reasoned out doctrine of Saint Thomas (I, II, quaest 84-87) it would appear that such a soul would rather appall the world by its absolute recklessness and obstinacy in sin, and that if, through a singular permission of God, the experiment were repeated not once, but ten times, a hundred, or a thousand times, the lost soul returning to earth would, each time, refuse penance and resume its life of sin ten times, or a hundred, or a thousand times; clearly and openly manifesting that its case is absolutely hopeless, and that there is no alternative but to intern such a maniac where his presence could do no harm. *Deep calleth on deep, at the noise of thy flood-gates.* (Psalm 41:8) The abysmal wickedness of the reprobate calls for the abysmal punishment of hell. Our Lord, in the Apocalypse 2:24, speaks of "*the depths of Satan.*" There are also the depths of all the other reprobates.

In our extremely superficial way of regarding this dread mystery of eternal damnation we are sometimes inclined to think that God is very severe to the unrepentant sinner, and that hell is perhaps too great a punishment. There is, however, no other way left to God. The sinner refused to be wholesome; he deliberately chose putrescence for his portion: he must therefore be ejected with a curse to endure the penalty of eternal fire. Fruit or meat that has become corrupt is thrown away in disgust but not in anger, and there

is no blame attached to its condition, but corrupted angelic natures and putrid human souls are guilty of their own evil.

Hell is thus the destined place where, day by day, generation after generation, century after century, from the beginning of the world till the day of the Last Judgement, all the filth and corruption of spoiled angelic and human natures meet, intermingle, and accumulate: filth and rottenness that is moral, not material, of the spirit not of the flesh. O Lucifer, proud rebellious spirit without love, here is thy kingdom, worthy of thee: thou art the prince over all this immense and deep world of unspeakable filth. And you, sinner, my brother, do you realise that this is the goal to which you are tending and running with all your might, even as a river hastens its course to lose itself in the ocean? Can it be that you wish to dwell in that pool of filth and fire with all those miscreants for all eternity? Then indeed it will be *The second death* (Apocalypse 20:14), that death from which there is no possible resurrection!

Hell, then, is at one and the same time a state and a place; even as Heaven itself is a state and a place. The two things in either case cannot be separated. The special state calls for the particular place. Heaven is the place, or rather it is the Kingdom of the glory of God, and at the same time it demands of its inhabitants a state of perfect charity which can never be lost.

If, to suppose an impossibility, a devil or a reprobate were admitted into paradise, he would be in the realm of glory, but because he would not be in the state of charity, the splendour surrounding him would bum him with shame more fiercely that the very flames of hell. Hell itself is a mercy for the damned compared with the suffering that paradise would inflict upon them.

On the other hand, if a Saint, whether from among the blessed angels or Christians, one in whom the love of God was confirmed, were cast into hell, hell itself would not be to him the place of torment which it is to the reprobates; because he would love the very torments inflicted on him, as coming from the hands of the One he loved above all things. In other words: he would not be in the state of soul which makes hell what it is; he would be in the place of damnation, but not in the state of damnation. Now hell is simultaneously the state and the place of damnation.

This may help us in some measure to realize what it will be for the damned to appear at the Last Judgement, naked, unclean, and monstrously deformed as they are, in the midst of the splendour of the blessed Angels and Saints, and to face Our Blessed Lord in all His majesty of God made Man, and of Saviour of the world and of Supreme Judge of the living and the dead. This will prove so unbearable a torment to them that they will cry out to the mountains and the rocks: *Fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth upon the Throne and from the math of the Lamb . . . for the great day of their math is come, and who shall be able to stand?* (Apocalypse 6:16-17).

Hell has its place in the grand Mystical Order of which we spoke in the preceding chapter.

The state of the reprobate is due to the act of sin, and it is true that by sin the reprobate has taken himself, as far as possible, out of the mystical order. The place of the reprobate, however, the hell of the damned, is not of his making. It is due to the direct intervention of God: like all the other works of God, it is good in itself and shows forth His wisdom, His justice, and His sanctity. It forces the reprobate, in spite of himself, to fall back into the harmony of the universe and of the mystical order.

If there were no hell, God would be overcome by the sinner; good would be defeated by evil. There must therefore be a hell. If the fact of free will both of angels and men be granted, and the willful guilt of angels and men, and their final impenitence, then hell for them is as unavoidable a necessity as Heaven itself for the reward of the faithful mystic, angel or man. Hell is a part of the mystical order of the universe.

There is yet another aspect under which hell appears in the mystical order: that is as a real demonstration of the extent of the love of God, All these reprobates will stand for ever as so many monuments of the unspeakable love of God. God has loved each one of these fallen spirits, each one of these reprobate men, with a personal love most tender and strong and delicate. He has loved them from all eternity, and it was because He loved them that He created them. He made them in love, loving them and yearning to love them for all eternity, and in order that they also might love Him and be happy with the very happiness of God, This is proclaimed by their whole shattered being.

Just as a pitiful and yet majestic ruin, as, for instance, that of the Cathedral of Rheims today, proclaims through its broken arches and noble pillars still standing erect, with its mutilated statues and fragments of mouldings, the vastness and magnificence of the building when it stood in its integrity, and the skill and love with which its architect had planned and built and adorned it; so the incorruptible essence of the pure spirits and of the human souls of the reprobates, and the persevering keenness of their intellects and the unbending strength of their wills, and the nobility of their incorruptible bodies after the Resurrection - all will bear witness to the splendid uses to which God in His love had destined them, having made them first in His own image and likeness, and given them in His grace, the means of

intensifying this their likeness to God, to an untold degree, until at last they would have been assumed into the very glory of God and made a part of it.

Our forefathers, in the Ages of Faith, understood this great truth that Hell itself is a proof and, in its way, an eternal monument of the love unspeakable with which Divine Goodness pursues his rational creature. They found it no difficulty in reconciling this formidable dogma of an eternal Hell with all we know of the necessary attributes of God. In the famous inscription on the gates of his Inferno Dante reads:

To rear me was the task of power divine,
Supremest wisdom and primeval love.

The Marriage of the Lamb

The Marriage of the Lamb (Apocalypse 19:7), as it will be inaugurated after the Last Judgement, is to be the final stage in the marvellous evolution of mystical life.

Arrived at this point of our task we feel like a mountaineer whose courage flags at the foot of the last and sublimest, but most dizzy and difficult peak. The temptation is strong to abandon the attempt, and good reasons would not be wanting to justify such a course.

The questions shape themselves in our mind; Why should we try to say something on so difficult and inaccessible a subject? Who ever before tried to tell what will follow for the Blessed, upon the Last Judgement? Is it not madness, and presumption to dare such a climb? Is it not like courting disaster?

Again: Why not leave this to the secret teaching of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the mystics, very few in number, who care to look forward so far into the mysterious future? Does it not baffle description? Does it not set at naught the possibilities of human language? Does it not defy even pure spiritual conceptions of the kind which are accessible to us in our pilgrimage? Fain would we cry out: O my brothers who have followed us thus far, do not press us to go on: a man like you and a worse sinner, we have never gazed upon the divine realities on the other side of the veil. One who was once more favoured, even during his pilgrimage days, could only stammer about it: *The eye hath not seen nor the ear heard, neither hath it entered the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.* (I Corinthians 2:9) Not even now from what they see and experience, could the Blessed in Paradise give a description of the bliss that is

to come, after the present order of things has been abolished altogether and superseded by the pure Order of Glory at its highest. Is it not remarkable that the divine Revelation of Holy Scriptures, which tells us so much of what will happen between now and the last sentence of the Divine Judge, does not enter into details as to what will follow the words of Christ: *Come ye, blessed of My Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* (Matthew 25:34) Might we not, then, for the purpose of this chapter, content ourselves with saying:

It is simply ineffable!

And yet, somehow, this would not be satisfactory. It would seem little short of treason not to indicate at least in a few words, the final stage of the wonderful mystical evolution. We have not led our reader so far and so high along the paths of the mystical doctrine, to abandon him before reaching the most desired spot; before, at least, like Moses dying, casting a glance from afar, upon the Promised Land not only of the actual bliss of the Saints in Heaven as it is now, but further at that of the After-Judgement Nuptials of the Lamb; just as Moses dying was given a view of the material Promised Land, and in it a further revelation of the Kingdom of Christ, the Catholic Church, of which the first was only the image and prelude and a sort of faint beginning.

When the end of the world in its present condition shall have been accomplished, when the cursed ones shall have been banished for ever to their fiery prison, and the Blessed shall have been assumed into glory, are we to consider that the last stage of the grand evolution has been reached? We may if we like, still we must not call it an end, but rather a beginning. All that has gone before will then appear in its true light of a grand preparation for infinitely more

magnificent realities, which are to last for ever. The mysteries of time had to be consummated ere the as yet unrevealed mysteries of eternity could begin. These are all summed up in the entrancing words: *The Marriage-feast of the Lamb*.

And I saw, says Saint John in the Apocalypse: *a new Heaven and a new earth; for the first Heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea is no more. And I, John, saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of Heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people^ and God Himself shall be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more, nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow shall be any more, for the former things are passed away. And He that sat on the Throne said: Behold I make all things new.* (Apocalypse 21:1-5)

Jesus, the Heavenly Bridegroom, will not be perfected in us until after the General Resurrection and the Last Judgement. Only then will the Church, His mystical Bride, come at last to the fulness of her charms. Only then also will each one of the Blessed be all that God wishes him to be. Till then the mystical body of Christ, and every individual member of it, is still in the making. Till then Christ is not filled in, and the real feast cannot begin. Creation goes on as long as men are to be born. Incarnation has to be extended to every Christian that will be made to the very end of the world. Redemption will have worked out its full and final effect only when death has been overcome in the resurrection of all flesh. And only when all the Blessed shall have received their reward in soul and body, according to their works and the after-effects thereof, will Sanctification shine in its full splendour.

The Church as it is now, even the Triumphant Church of the Angels and Saints, is yet but as a little maid, compared to the perfect Bride God the Father desires her to become for the delight of His Son. *Soror nostra parva*, says the chorus in the mystical love-drama of the Canticle of Canticles - *Soror nostra parva et ubera non habet* (Canticle 8:8). This is equally true respectively of the whole Church and of every individual predestined, whether already in Heaven or yet on earth, whether of angelic or of human nature: each one in regard to the Heavenly Bridegroom, is at present, but as a little maid, dearly loved indeed and very happy in His love, but not yet come to the rounded fulness of her charms which are to give joy to the Beloved, nor to the fulness of her capacity for the enjoyment of His mystical divine embraces. This twofold perfection will be realised in the Church as the mystical body of Christ, and in each separate Saint, only after the winding up of the affairs of time by the grand assize of the Last Judgement, not only because then each one will receive according to his works, but also because each one will then be assigned his definite place in the eternal hierarchy of perfect charity. This could not have been done before.

The capacity for enjoyment of the Blessed in Heaven, Angels and Saints, immense as it is and immensely gratified, is far from having reached its utmost limit. It is not known to the Blessed themselves; it will come to them as a revelation. Indeed, they may take for themselves the words of Saint Paul, addressed to us: *It hath not yet appeared what we shall be.* (I John 3:2) Even the Angels of God, each in his own capacity, will receive, after the Last Judgement, an ineffable increase of personal nobility, brightness and joy, resulting from the fulfilment of Jesus Christ in the Church, and from the perfect loveliness of His Bride, for whom they employed themselves so diligently whilst time lasted and she was a pilgrim on earth.

It would be wrong indeed to imagine that the joy of the Blessed, even the essential joy of the Beatific Vision as they now taste it, cannot be increased. It all depends on whether their capacity for knowing God and loving Him is susceptible of an increase. We must remember that God is the Master of the feast yet to come of the eternal Nuptials of the Lamb. God is the Maker both of feast and guests, and He will fit them, the former to the latter by giving the finishing touch of His omnipotent hand to each one of the Blessed on the occasion of the Last Judgement. There is a great difference between the lovely apple blossom in early spring, and the full ripe fruit in russet autumn; the one is but the first fair promise and early token, whilst the other is glorious fulfilment. Thus with the blessed as they are now and as they will be at the end of the world.

The Nuptials of the Lamb will not be barren. This Virginal marriage of the Son of God with His predestined Bride, the Church of the Blessed, will bear a fruit inferior only to that of the mystic marriage of the Virgin Mary with the Holy Ghost, which was Christ Himself. This is the fruit it shall bring forth: the Perfect Praise of the Creator.

And this marvellous new birth will be of a begetting proper to God: eternal - eternal, not only in its endless duration, but in its very mode. Eternally does God the Father say to His Son: *Filius meus es tu, ego hodie genui te*; eternally also and with infinite rapture of joy will the Lamb of God and His Bride, the Church of the predestined say to the Perfect Praise of God: Thou art my child: this day have I begotten thee. (Psalm 2:7)

Conclusion

We have now arrived at the end of what we may consider as the Preliminaries of the Doctrine of the Mystical Life.

Before we could begin to treat of the two great functions of the Mystical Life which are Divine Contemplation and Saintly Action, the ground had to be cleared and the right notion of the Mystical Life itself had to be vindicated. This we have now done at some length, more by way of statement and development of the traditional idea of mystical life than by way of controversy, trusting that the splendour of this traditional view will win back to itself many minds which have been led astray by more modem, but narrow and unsatisfactory, definitions. We do not think there is one single chapter in these two volumes presenting some special aspect of the traditional notion, which is not calculated to help to a more thorough and practical understanding of the workings of the Mystical Life.

Our readers ought by now to be quite convinced that the Mystical Life is simply life with God; simply a conscious, sustained, loving attention to God; that is to say, the life of a fervent soul with God, under the veil of faith, in the sanctuary of its own heart; in other words, the intercourse of mutual love between God and the fervent Christian.

Only when thus understood, in the light of the traditional notion of Mysticism, will the religion of Christ and the Catholic Church receive its true import. Only traditional Mysticism does justice to the idea of God and to the idea of man, as these are presented to us in Divine Revelation. The mystic alone does full justice to his Christianity.

"I seek a man," said the old cynic Diogenes, groping in full day-light with his lantern. He sought and sought in vain; he could never find a man until he found a true servant of God; and there was none at Athens in his day, though it was the proud boast of that city that she was then the Queen of Intellectualism.

The mystic alone is worthy of the name of man, because he alone grasps the divine purpose of life. The others are simply beasts of burden, or beasts of prey, or beasts of pleasure, or beasts of pride, as we have seen.

The world is in labour of a definite order which will be all mystical, all supernatural, all glorious and divinely blissful. The present world is in labour of the Heavenly Jerusalem, which is to receive all the predestined children of God and to embrace one day, within its precincts, all this material universe. As man is a creature in the making, so is Heaven, and so also, for that matter, is hell. We are called upon to help. This material world of our probation is the workshop. We are pressed into the service of one side or the other, and none but the infant or the idiot, is allowed to remain neutral. If one is not with Jesus one i9 against Him. He, therefore, who shall not fit himself ultimately for mystical life in Paradise will be a reprobate.

The mystic is really the only man on earth who knows how to enjoy himself and make the best of the present life. The others enjoy death, not life; for what they call life is death. God is life, and the mystic alone is wise enough to enjoy God.

O that all men might become true mystics! O that it might be given us to allure them to this the only true life, more and more, in displaying to their gaze the splendours of Divine Contemplation and the supernatural charms of Saintly

Action, as we hope to do, with the help of God, in the volumes yet to be published.

About This EBook

The text of this ebook is taken from *Mysticism - True and False*, by Father Savinien Louismet, O.S.B. The edition used was printed by Westminster Press in London, England. The author says that the substance of this work appeared first in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* of January and April, 1916.

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The cover image is a detail of the oil painting *Peter's conflict with Simon Magus*, by Avanzino Nucci, 1620. It shows Simon Magus trying to buy the power to heal from Saint Peter the Apostle, as though it was a magic trick. The image was swiped from Wikimedia Commons.

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